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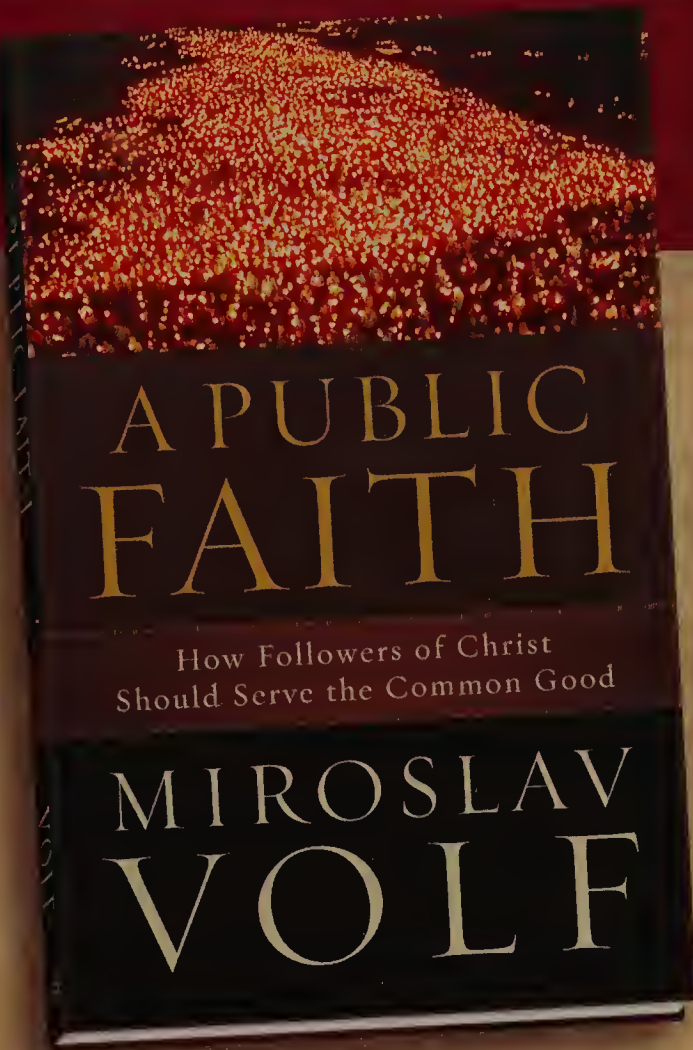
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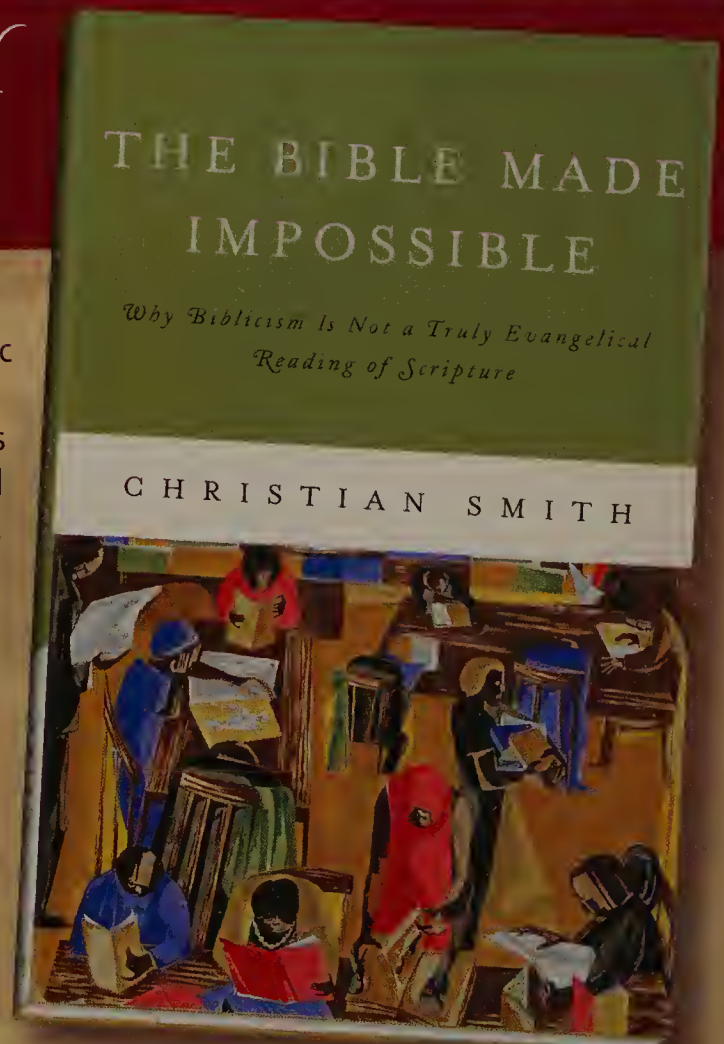


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View video from Smith on *The Bible Made Impossible*



Book report

ALMOST BUT NOT QUITE as wonderful as a week at the ocean with 11 grandchildren is the day they all depart, leaving us suddenly alone. Then serious reading begins.

In his bestselling book *In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin*, Erik Larson tells the story of William Dodd, a University of Chicago professor who was the first U.S. ambassador to Germany after the Nazis had seized power. His experiences provide intriguing insights into the puzzle of how a cultured, well-educated nation spawned a demonic fascist dictatorship.

In the context of the arrogant self-certainty of some in the evangelical community and the dry rationalism of the new atheists, I've found two resources for inquiring people who want to know what Christians really believe: *Why Jesus Matters*, by George W. Stroup, a professor of theology, and *The Other Jesus: Rejecting a Religion of Fear for the God of Love*, by Greg Garrett, novelist, professor of English and a licensed lay preacher.

In thinking about how to observe the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, I discovered a couple of thoughtful

books. In *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, explores work being done in the area of trauma studies, from the devastating impact of domestic violence to her own experience of loss, trauma and grief. Two faith claims are the foundation of the book: "We live in a world profoundly broken by violence" and "God loves this world and desires that suffering be met by hope, love and grace." In "9/11's Emmaus, Gracing the Disordered Theological Imagination," Jones suggests that disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus because they were caught in the feedback loop of the violence they had witnessed in the crucifixion.

The essays in Walter Brueggemann's *Truth-Telling as Subversive Obedience* first appeared in *Journal for Preachers*. As always, Brueggemann is strong, spirited and grounded in the presence of Yahweh in the world. I especially liked "The Proclamation of Resurrection in the Old Testament" and "Truth-Telling Comfort" (written on September 12, 2001). Both books will help as our church collaborates in planning an interfaith service of remembrance and reflection.

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Churches and schools

Amy Frykholm's article on education reform ("Reform that works," Aug. 9) should prompt us to think about innovation in outreach. For too long, a "separation of church and state" mentality has kept churches and municipalities from becoming partners, making our public schools "no go" areas for congregational ministry. This needs to stop. Jefferson penned his immortal words to protect liberty, not to promote illiteracy.

We can find ecumenical agreement on helping children learn to read. And surely we can agree on more than that: on putting nutritious food in hungry kids' stomachs, providing learning supplies and thanking and encouraging teachers. A local ecumenical and interreligious partnership in my city has done these things in five of our public schools.

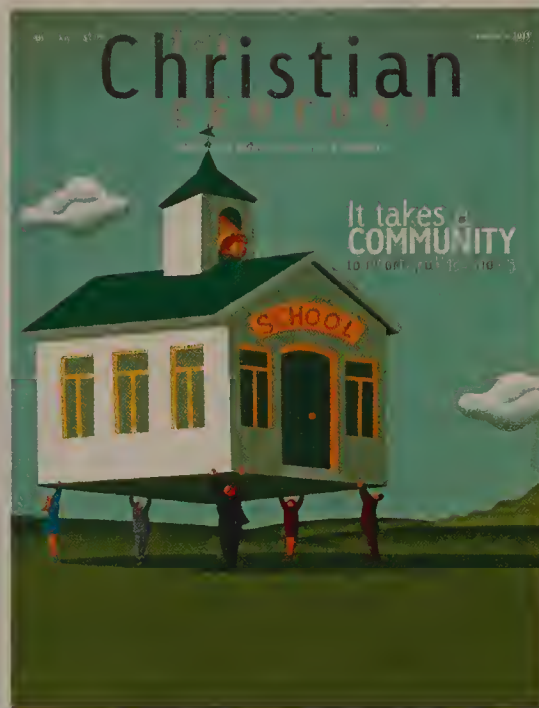
Jesus spoke strongly about the importance of caring for children. When we allow our schools to fail, we fall short of our Christian mandate.

Sandy Webb
Roanoke, Va.

Otherly love . . .

I appreciate the articles in the August 9 issue ("Alternative ways" and "All due respect") that reiterate Jesus' call to honor everyone—not only embracing people with whom we disagree, not only honoring people with whom we differ with respect to personal values, philosophy or theological perspectives, but to likewise honor and embrace people we find to have done something we hold as unconscionable or evil.

Unless we operate out of a paradigm of radical forgiveness and acceptance—a paradigm of universal and unconditional love—this may seem like a very tall order. I agree with John Buchanan that how we relate to the "other" is indeed the most important moral and theological issue of our time.



As Buchanan writes, I'm convinced that "we can view religious diversity as part of God's economy. We can hold together two ideas: that God's love is universal and unconditional, and that Jesus Christ is the full expression of that love." But in my mind, because of the word *the*, this concluding statement disappoints. It does not beckon us to the alternative way Buchanan invites us to consider! I would have preferred: "Jesus Christ is *a* full expression of that love," one expression that is as whole and complete as other expressions of universal and unconditional love that arise out of other traditions.

Eric N. Smith
Denver, Colo.

Access to polls . . .

I agree with the closing statement of the July 26 editorial "Turning out voters" that government energies would be better devoted to encouraging participation in voting. The government has spent a great deal of time and money to crack down on voter fraud, yet nationwide fewer than 100 people have been convicted, with almost all of those cases involv-

ing confusion about the laws, not outright fraud.

Difficulty of access to polls, long lines at the polls and restrictions in eligibility are all keeping many citizens from voting. Let's focus on making it easier and more convenient to vote. Each state should recognize a registered voter from another state, rather than putting local obstacles in their way. Computers make all this easier and should be utilized to encourage every citizen to exercise the right to vote.

Betsy Grater
Elliott City, Md.

Elegy for a border collie . . .

The moving article by C. Clifton Black on the death of his border collie ("Unexpected grief," July 26) recalls for me Karl Barth's famous dictum, "We don't know about the animals; they may have a covenant with God that we know nothing about."

Philip Newell
New York, N.Y.

Having a beloved cat and recalling my feelings at her death, I wept while reading Black's essay. Who knows the source of our grief? Is the source, as Black surmises, "companionship lost"? I think we understand imperfectly the sources of our grief at our pets' deaths. As Loren Eiseley said, "I cannot practice the terrible archaeology of the brain."

I think that mystery must be implicated in our grief—the mystery of the "other" in our cat or dog. We know we will never know what a cat thinks while watching a rabbit eat flowers.

Perhaps our pets become a sign of ultimate otherness, ultimate mystery. When they die, we lose, in a small way, the presence of mystery. Perhaps we mourn that loss also.

Harry Sterling
Prudence Island, R.I.

September 6, 2011

Planning for grace

John Henry Newman, the recently beatified English cardinal, said that the church is shaped by the dynamic interaction of three elements: worship, theological reflection and institutional governance. As he saw it, these three activities work in creative tension. Left to themselves, each sphere becomes corrupted: worship tends toward “superstition and enthusiasm,” theology toward “rationalism,” and governance toward “ambition, craft and cruelty.”

Those churchly iniquities are common enough. Those who walk away from church might be categorized according to what wounded them most: the rigidity or chaos of the liturgy, the sterility of the theology or the character flaws of the leaders.

Yet Newman’s scheme omits one element that is crucial in the life of the church: people skilled in the everyday practices of faith. If a church does not form people who live in Christ and display some measure of forgiveness, compassion, hospitality, care for the Earth, solidarity with those who suffer and perseverance in distress, then no liturgy or theology, however rich, and no governance system, however inspired, will save the church.

In recent decades, Protestants have adopted the Roman Catholic language of “formation” to draw attention to this dimension of faith. Though it is still rare to find a Protestant congregation advertising for a “director of Christian formation,” the concept has become clear enough: the church’s goal is not to pass on information about the Bible or doctrine, as important as that is, but to form people whose lives embody the good news of God’s love encountered in Jesus.

The resources for faith formation have grown enormously in this period, both in number and variety, yet the task remains somewhat elusive. In part that’s because everything the church does—from arranging the nursery to welcoming new members to organizing potluck dinners—is formative in some way. Churches that succeed in formation tend to be ones that artfully use all aspects of church life—committee meetings as well as formal instruction programs—as opportunities to deepen and extend people’s faith.

Formation is elusive also because one can never predict how it will happen. Why does a particular Christian practice catch people’s hearts and lead them to incorporate it in their lives and articulate its Christian meaning for others? Encouraging formation is an art, not a science, and the result is always bound up in the mystery of grace.

So formation is a matter of grace, but not only grace. In his article “Faith forming faith” (p. 20), Paul E. Hoffman describes how a new Christian’s commitment to hospitality unexpectedly shaped the witness of an entire congregation. The moment could not have been planned. Yet, as Hoffman shows, the groundwork for it was laid by an ongoing program of adult formation. Formation comes by grace, as do all good things. And—to quote Norman Maclean in *A River Runs Through It*—“grace comes by art and art does not come easy.”

Christian formation is an art, not a science, and the result is always bound up in the mystery of grace.

CENTURY marks

PROPHET FOR THE AGES: The prophet Jeremiah was a failure in his time—he failed to save Jerusalem from destruction and he couldn't keep his contemporaries from rebelling against Babylon. Nevertheless, Jeremiah espoused three great truths, says Rabbi Mordecai Schreiber: that God is One, that we need to take personal responsibility for our actions and can't simply blame the group to which we belong, and that human effort is the way to redeem the world. Jeremiah was the source of the rabbinic concept, "One does not rely on miracles" (tikkun.org).

BOOKS ON WHEELS: Since homeless people have no address, they can't get a library card. Laura Moulton, a novelist, has started a mobile book service in Portland, Oregon, that takes books to the homeless. As part of Street Books (streetbooks.org), Moulton pulls a wagonload of books behind her bike,

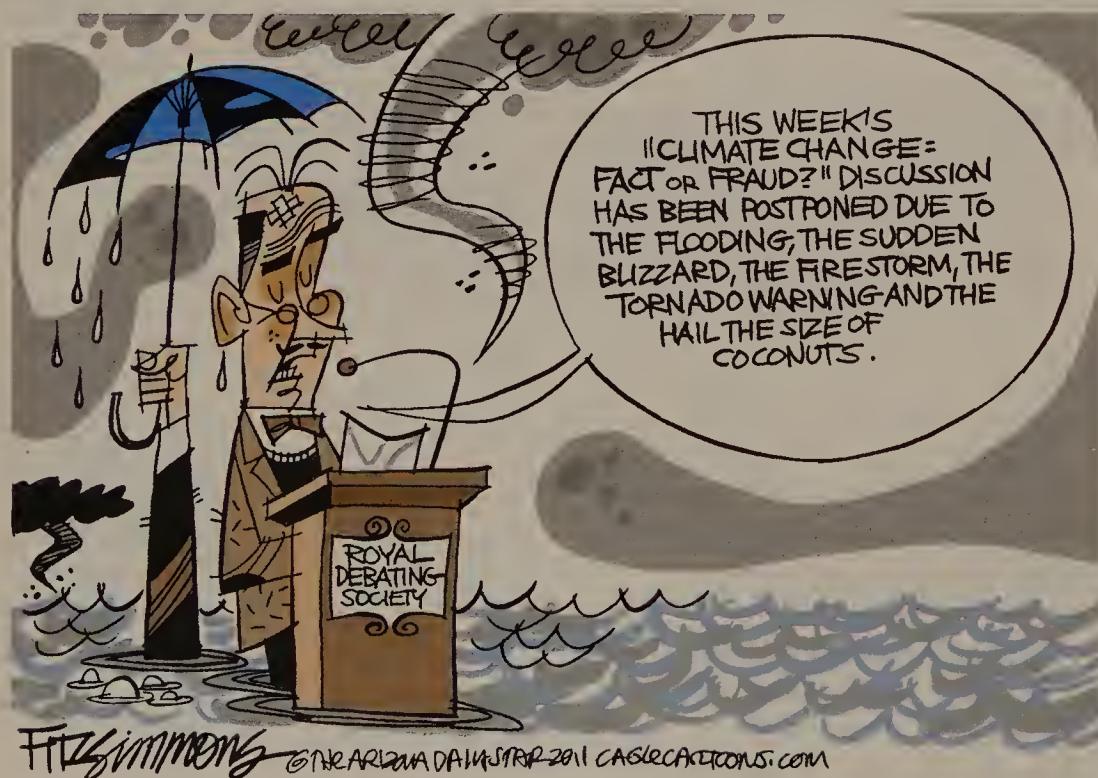
stopping at sites where the homeless congregate. She has established a checkout system, and she's found that her clients are good about returning books (*Christian Science Monitor*, August 10).

BACK TO SCHOOL RALLY: When Texas governor Rick Perry held a public prayer meeting last month in Houston before announcing he was a candidate for the Republican presidential race, about 30,000 people showed up. What didn't get much national attention was a much larger gathering in Houston that same day which drew 100,000 and had to turn people away. It was the first city-wide back-to-school event at which children were given free backpacks, school supplies, uniforms, haircut vouchers, immunizations and even food. Planners, who expected only 25,000, were overwhelmed at the response (*Houston Chronicle*, August 7).

STREETWISE: Greg Scott, a sociology professor at DePaul University in Chicago, is an award-winning filmmaker with a passion for telling the stories of junkies, crackheads, hustlers and hookers and for showing how these people are also mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. Scott is a member of a worldwide movement to prevent the spread of HIV and other diseases transmitted by drug users. He carries a bag with condoms and clean syringes, which he gives out for free, and naloxone, an overdose-reversal medication, which he has used to bring addicts back from the brink of death (*Columbia Journalism Review*, March-April, excerpted in *Utne*, July-August).

RICH DIFFERENCE: Social scientist Dacher Keltner has conducted numerous studies which lead him to conclude that rich people really are different from the rest of society: they are less empathetic, less altruistic and more selfish. He's found that people with low incomes are better able to decipher the emotions of people in photographs than are rich people. His claims have been contested, however, by social scientists who point to other studies showing different results. A study last year at Harvard and Duke indicated that regardless of income or political affiliation, Americans think income should be equally distributed. Rich people tended to think income is already equally distributed (MSNBC, August 10).

WELFARE "REFORM": The food stamp program seems to have worked well during the recent recession. The number of recipients has increased by about 30 percent. Welfare, since it was "reformed" in 1996, is another matter. Getting through the hoops to receive assistance from the Temporary



Assistance to Needy Families is difficult and the decisions can be arbitrary. Some recipients have called it the “Torture and Abuse of Needy Families” program. One couple was told that to qualify they must each apply for 40 jobs a week, even though their car was in disrepair and they had no money for gas or babysitting (Barbara Ehrenreich’s afterword to the 2011 edition of *Nickel and Dimed*).

NOT INJURIOUS TO RELIGION:

Philip Schwadel, a sociologist at the University of Nebraska, says his research counters the notion that the more education a person has the less religious he or she will be. More education actually correlates with more prayer, Bible reading, volunteerism and church attendance. While having more education doesn’t correlate with disaffiliation from religion, it does increase the odds of switching religious affiliation, especially switching into a mainline Protestant denomination (InsideHigherEd.com, August 8).

MASTER RULES: “The Marriage Vow,” signed by several Republican presidential candidates, claimed that “a child born into slavery in 1860 was more likely to be raised by his mother and father in a two-parent household than was an African-American baby born after the election of the USA’s first African-American President.” This pro-slavery line was dropped from the statement following public outrage. In reality, slave owners controlled the most intimate relationships of their slaves, who were forced to copulate with other slaves or their masters and who had no legal right to marriage until the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Though some owners permitted their slaves to exchange marriage vows, slave couples could be forcibly separated at the whim of their owners (*New York Times*, August 1).

SEEKER SENSITIVE? Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, withdrew from participation in Leadership Summit 2011 at Willow Creek Church in suburban Chicago, responding to an online petition targeting the church’s stance toward gays. The petition claims that Willow Creek has “practiced dan-

“This deal is a sugar-coated Satan sandwich. If you lift the bun, you will not like what you see.”

— Rep. Emanuel Cleaver [D., Mo.], a United Methodist minister, about Washington’s debt-ceiling deal [RNS]

“This church was courageous. They were willing to call a person and not a gender.”

— North Carolina female pastor Bailey Edwards Nelson, whose Flat Rock Baptist Church in Mount Airy was expelled in late July from the Surry Baptist Association because association members believe that scripture permits only male pastors [ABP]

gerous conversion therapy to ‘cure’ people of their sexual orientation.” Pastor Bill Hybels says the church isn’t antigay but expects its people to uphold the principle that sex belongs only in a marriage between a man and a woman. The summit was broadcast to 40 nations by satellite (*Toledo Blade*, August 12).

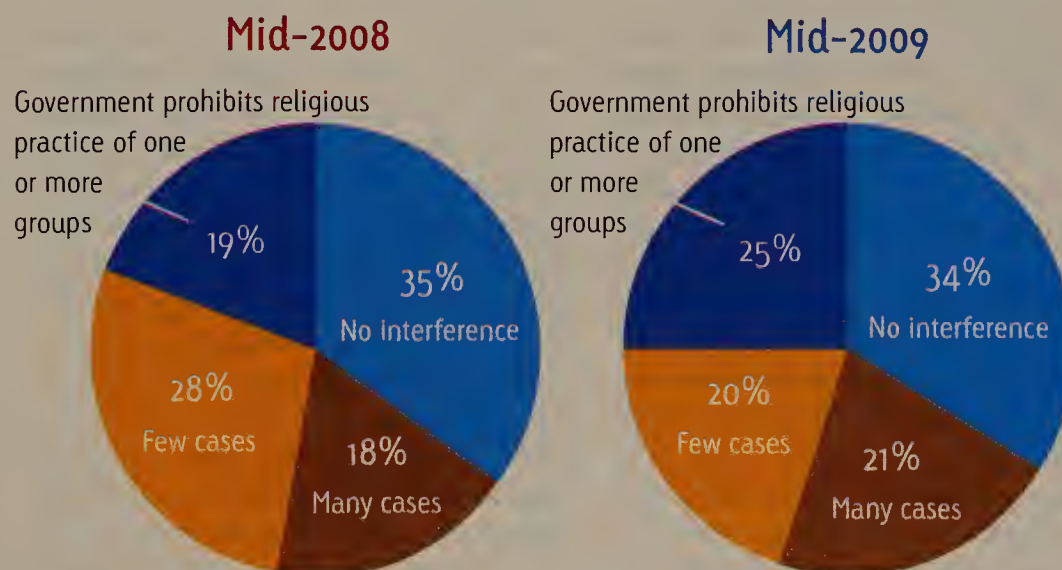
JUST FRIENDS: According to the Sesame Workshop, the puppets Ernie and Bert are just friends and they will remain that. The producers of the children’s TV program *Sesame Street* were responding to an online petition asking for the show to feature a gay wedding between Ernie and Bert as a way of encouraging acceptance of gays. The two characters have lived together at 123 Sesame Street since 1969. They

share a bedroom but have single beds. “Even though they are identified as male characters and possess many human traits and characteristics, they remain puppets, and do not have a sexual orientation,” Sesame Workshop said on its official Facebook page (Reuters).

JUST ASK: Robert Kaplan, who teaches management practice at Harvard Business School and was a vice president at Goldman Sachs, suggests that more questions need to be asked in the workplace. People think it is a sign of weakness to ask questions, he says, but leadership is a team undertaking. Both managers and employees need to know their strengths and weaknesses. Kaplan recommends that you ask your co-workers what yours are (*Chicago Tribune*, August 7).

Government interference in religion around the world

Percent of countries that interfere with worship or other religious practices:



Source: Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life

Teatime with my demons

by Suzanne Guthrie

MY FRIEND Brother Bede likes to tell a story about the Buddhist saint Milarepa. When demons came to his cave to torment him, Milarepa said to them, “How kind of you to come. You must come again tomorrow. And from time to time we must converse.” And Milarepa invited the demons in for tea.

The story surprised me the first time I heard it. When I think of saint-plaguing demons, I picture Anthony the Great battling in conflicts so loud that passers-by think he’s being attacked by a band of robbers. Like everyone, I have enemies: people who wish me ill, or who have hurt me deeply whether they meant to or not. But my worst enemies dwell in the cave of my own heart. “Love your enemies,” said Jesus, “and pray for those who persecute you.” In addition to loving and praying for those who hurt me, might Jesus mean these inner enemies of the heart—my personal demons?

My demons manifest themselves in forms so familiar I don’t even recognize them when they come to call until it’s too late and I’ve lost my equilibrium: anxiety, perfectionism, the sweet savor of annoyance over another’s bad habits, self-loathing, secret *schadenfreude*, guilty liberal acquiescence to the consumer culture. I wear my own unique and delicate scent of sloth—a mix of busyness, industry, accomplishment and avoidance. My subtle demons often mask as virtues in a greedy society, blending with patterns in my holier-than-thou nonexploitative clothing, sitting in the backseat of my compact car and lurking behind my uneco-friendly plastic recycling bins.

There was a time when men and women left the cities to encounter God in the desert. But memories, experiences, habits, prejudices and irrational fears

came with them, clashing with silence, starkness and solitude. Extracting themselves from the demons camouflaged within their culture, they found concentrated phantasms erupting from their own thoughts, unhealed personalities and broken selves. Seeking purity of heart, the desert mothers and fathers had to face the demons erupting from their own hearts.

Once, after a particularly exhausting confrontation, Anthony complains, “Where wast Thou? Why didst Thou not appear from the beginning to cease my pains?”

“Anthony,” the Holy One replies, “I was here: but I was waiting to see thy contest.”

This has never been a satisfying answer to me. It reminds me of a legend about St. Teresa of Ávila. When she was thrown off an oxcart into an icy arroyo during a rainstorm, she heard the voice of the Beloved: “Teresa, this is how I treat my friends.” She didn’t lose time in responding, “Surely this is why you have so few of them!” Besides throwing clumps of psalmage (as we say in our community) as a way to dissipate demonic presences, the Christian tradition recommends laughter. “The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of scripture,” said Martin Luther, “is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.” Similarly, Thomas More said, “The devil . . . that prowde spirit . . . cannot endure to be mocked.”

I recently found a Japanese ink cartoon by 18th-century Zen master Hakuin Ekaku that shows a blind man and a giant one-eyed goblin. The text says, “Who’s that gr-gr-growling over there? What? A one-eyed goblin? I’m not afraid of you—since I have no eyes at all, you should be scared of me!”

When I laugh at myself and my perfectionism, my sloth, my resentment, the devils deflate like old balloons. When Bede told me the story of Milarepa, I wondered whether I should begin to pray for these demons who dwell within my heart, as I do for my enemies. Perhaps I might invite them to tea?

Lately when my demons show up, I try to have the presence of mind to invite them into my consciousness. I call them by name. I welcome them like old friends. “Hello, Sloth. Lovely scent you’re wearing.” Surprisingly, my bad spirits are less chaotic when I pay attention to them.

Rilke said, “Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.”

I have to befriend the demons dwelling in the cave of my heart if I want to arrive at the kind of psychological equilibrium admired by the disciples who broke down the barrier to Anthony’s fortress. “And when they beheld him, they were amazed to see that his body had maintained its former condition, neither fat from lack of exercise, nor emaciated from fasting and combat with demons, but was just as they had known him prior to his withdrawal. The state of his soul was one of purity, for it was not constricted by grief, nor relaxed by pleasure, nor affected by either laughter or dejection.” Indeed, to his friends he seemed “led by divine mysteries and inspired by God.”

CC

Suzanne Guthrie lives with the Episcopal sisters of the Community of the Holy Spirit on their organic farm in Brewster, New York. She posts a weekly self-guided retreat on the lectionary Gospel lessons at edgeofenclosure.org.

Mixed motives

by Michael L. Lindvall

DURING THE last of three classes for new members at the congregation I serve, we ask people to introduce themselves by briefly recounting their journey in the faith and how it led them to the third floor of the Old Parish House of the Brick Church. The process takes a while. Some of the narratives are compelling, others are banal. None of them is ever the whole truth.

I listen as a pregnant couple reflects on wanting a community of faith in which to raise their child. I'm sure that's true, but I would guess that in a few years they hope to apply to our very popular preschool, and they know their chances of admission are better if they're members of the congregation. I listen to the anxious mother of a 13-year-old boy, and I surmise that her son is being pulled into the Upper East Side fast lane by his private school peers; our confirmation program and youth group might be the needed antidote. A young single woman who just moved to New York from Charlotte remembers aloud how much her experience in her home church meant to her. She now lives in a two-room apartment in the forest of high-rises in upper Yorkville and works 60-hour weeks as an administrator at a hedge fund. It's not hard to guess that she's longing for friends like the ones she found at her home church.

Such mixed motives are not just a contemporary urban phenomenon. Western missionaries working in China in past centuries were often criticized for producing "rice Christians"—hungry converts attracted to mission stations and baptism by free food. A friend of my parents who was from a remote corner of Alaska would mock the various stripes of Protestant missionaries in Kotzebue for bidding against each other for native converts

with free music lessons. If the Adventists offered electric keyboard tutorials, the Pentecostals would trump them with electric guitar courses.

For roughly 1,500 years, when Christianity was the established faith of the West, some measure of churchgoing was obligatory socially if not legally. This Christendom produced Christians with profoundly ambiguous motives and convictions. Indeed, there are still places in this country where local people ask newcomers, "What church do you go to?" The assumption is that everyone in the town goes to church.

Later, the ideal became one of association by pure conviction. You joined—or associated with—a particular congregation out of simple theological conviction. You signed up with a community because its members believed what you had come to believe. This was the putative ideal, the only pure motivation for church affiliation. It's a motivation I have seldom heard voiced at our third new members' class. And when I've heard it, I've suspected that it was spoken, at least in part, because it was thought to be the right answer.

Such simplicity as this—association by pure conviction—misunderstands human beings on at least two counts and underestimates God on one. First, faith, as I always remind the new members when they're standing before the congregation to declare their faith, is not an arrival; it is a journey. The faith questions put to them as part of the liturgy are radical but theologically minimal. They declare Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior and promise faithfulness to the church community. These most basic declarations are very much at odds with our culture of relativism and individualism, but they imply no complete Christian faith. Thus, I tell the new members, joining is not so much a faith arrival

as it is a commitment to journey deeper into faith. The human fact is that we are in process—all of us all the time. We are never there, but always on the way. Luther, no slouch in matters of conviction, said as much: "We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road."

Second, humans are relational and congregations are communities of relationship. People become part of congregations not just for God, but also for other people. In the February 2002 issue of *Atlantic*, Toby Lester explored why new religious movements succeed. In a later interview, Lester said the force of his conclusions was that "success [of these religious movements] is really about relationships. . . . After the fact people do think it's about faith. And they're not lying, by the way. They're just projecting backwards." His analysis is perhaps too monovalent, too dubious about theological conviction, but it reminds us that faith communities are just that: communities sought out and joined for the community as well as the faith.

Finally, to assume that people affiliate with churches only for the purest of motives is to underestimate God. God uses a young couple's zeal for their child's education, the anxiety of the mother of a rebellious adolescent and the loneliness of a young single woman. God uses fine church choirs, fancy organs and lovely church architecture. Perhaps God even uses free rice and complimentary guitar lessons. We are complex beings, multivalent, fallen, our every motivation mixed. In order to find us, God, as C. S. Lewis says, is not above the use of "fine nets and stratagems." **CC**

Michael L. Lindvall is pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City.

Food crisis calls for long-term response

As relief organizations minister to thousands suffering from drought and famine in the Horn of Africa, some religious leaders say they are exploring short- and long-term strategies for ending the reliance on food aid.

The worst drought in 60 years is affecting more than 12 million people in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia. Its epicenter is Somalia, where tens of thousands are fleeing to refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia.

"We would not only want to work on the immediate needs, but we are thinking, because this is becoming a chronic problem, we have got to see the root causes and fight [them]," Archbishop Ian Ernest, chairman of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa, told news reporters August 10 in Nairobi after a meeting of Anglican archbishops.

"We are calling for immediate action to address the needs and root causes of the crisis in Somalia and the refugee population in Kenya and Ethiopia," said Ernest. The archbishops said donations are urgently needed.

As he spoke, an average of 1,300 Somali migrants fleeing both civil unrest and famine continued to arrive daily at the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya, which has become the world's largest camp—a small city of tents in a dusty desert.

The camp holds more than 400,000 migrants, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with new arrivals being settled in rows of identical white tents, portable latrines and mobile health clinics.

While the rate of arrivals remains steady in Kenya, the daily arrivals have dropped significantly in Ethiopia from 2,000 to 400, with no clear explanation, said Lemma Degefa, the Lutheran World

Federation country representative there. Ethiopia is hosting 114,539 Somali refugees in the Dolo Odo area in the east.

The UN's World Food Program is providing high-energy biscuits for a day's nutritional needs to new arrivals, in addition to a three-week food ration. All children under age five and pregnant women in the refugee camps and the transit centers are receiving special nutrition products. In Ethiopia, a total of about 42,000 children are benefiting.

UN Humanitarian Aid chief Catherine Bragg told the Security Council on August 10 that \$1.3 billion in relief aid is still needed, in addition to the \$1 billion already committed by world governments.

Separately, Martin Junge, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, which is managing the Dadaab camp for UNHCR, asked in a statement that pres-

sure be put on governments to contribute to the relief efforts.

In Kenya, the Anglican Church says that since last year it has spent over \$3.2 million in famine-related interventions. The UN program says 3.5 million people in the country are affected by the drought, worsened by high food and fuel prices.

"This [intervention] has been going because we discovered this [drought] a long time ago," said Archbishop Eluid Wabukala of Kenya in a statement. "The famine we are facing did not come as a surprise, as the drought was predicted well in advance," he said.

The effects of the drought will be ongoing and will spread, Junge added. "After the drought is over we have to prepare for mid-term and longer-term solutions for rehabilitation, climate change adaptation, and disaster preparedness," he said. —Fredrick Nzwili, ENInews



DROUGHT AND FAMINE: Newly arrived refugees carry their belongings through the Dadaab camp in northeastern Kenya. Already the world's largest refugee settlement, Dadaab has swelled in recent weeks with tens of thousands of recent arrivals fleeing drought in Somalia.

Upstate New York parish raising funds for statue of gay '9/11 saint'

Like most Americans, Brother Edmund Dwyer was stunned by early coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C.

As he struggled to grasp the scope of the carnage, scrolling type along the bottom of his television screen announced the death of Mychal Judge, a legendary New York City fire department chaplain.

For Dwyer, the vast tragedy became painfully real. "He was a saint," said Dwyer, 90, a retired Brother of the Christian Schools who resides at Christian Brothers Academy in DeWitt, New York.

He worked closely with Judge during the 1980s, when both men comforted dying AIDS patients in New York City. Judge was killed by flying debris at the World Trade Center.

"He always wore his Franciscan robes, and he had a smiling face and a beautiful manner," Dwyer said, recalling how Judge spent hours with young men who felt abandoned.

As a tribute to his friend, Dwyer is serving on a committee at All Saints Church in Syracuse, which intends to honor Judge with a memorial. Fred Daley, pastor at All Saints, intends to ask local firefighters to attend the dedication.

While the memorial will honor those killed on September 11, Daley said the way Judge lived his life carries special meaning for the All Saints congregation.

Mychal Judge—like Daley—was a Catholic priest who acknowledged publicly that he was a celibate gay man. In June, after months of discussion, parishioners at All Saints voted 256–3 to offer a statement of welcome to gays, lesbians and transgender men and women.

Daley said the vote meshes with his beliefs on what it means to be a Christian. "More and more, I've been called in my spiritual life and in my heart to identify with the powerless and with the broken, and I think some of that comes from my own journey as a gay person," Daley said.

The Catholic Church teaches that homosexual acts are inherently wrong.



LEGENDARY PRIEST: Sculptor Timothy Schmalz stands next to a bronze replica of his statue depicting several firefighters carrying the body of Catholic chaplain Mychal Judge, the "9/11 Saint." Funds are being raised for a statue of Judge alone.

While a new state law has legalized same-sex marriage in New York, the church does not recognize those ceremonies. Yet officials with the Diocese of Syracuse say that inviting gay men and women into a parish does not contradict church teaching. "Our hope is that all parishes are so welcoming, and it's certainly in line with who we are as Catholics," said Danielle Cummings, a diocesan spokeswoman.

Paul Lawrence, 76, an All Saints parishioner with a gay son, said family experience taught him a simple truth about the gay community: "Once you meet these folks, you wouldn't say they were gay or not gay," he said. "You'd just say they were awfully nice people."

Meg Ksander, a staff member at All Saints, said the journey toward the monument began last December with a series of talks by parishioners who at some point felt excluded by the Catholic Church. The congregation was especially moved by the stories of several gay men and women who spoke of how they'd spent their lives feeling ostracized.

As a result, Ksander said, a parish committee came up with the statement of affirmation—and with the idea of a statue. "The parishioners were talking about how our young gay folk so often had no role models until recently, and [we] saw Mychal Judge as both an interesting person and the ultimate example of a role

model," said Daley, who seven years ago decided to reveal that he was gay.

He went public as a means of support for young people struggling with their own identity, he said, and to underline that gay priests are not the cause of the child abuse scandal in the church.

"I was a Buddhist for many years, and now I'm a returning Catholic, and that's because of the message of [All Saints] which is so pure, so beautiful, so tolerant and so spiritual in the grandest sense of the word," said Michele Mosca-Wells, a gay member of the parish.

She's also moved by the plans to create a statue of Judge, who to her symbolizes the mission of the church. "It's a wonderful affirmation," she said, "of being an authentic Catholic community that embraces all and loves all." —Sean Kirst, RNS

Prisons seek chaplains after state budget cuts

In the weeks since North Carolina's legislature laid off most of its prison chaplains, Betty Brown, director of prison chaplaincy services, has been crisscrossing the state searching for volunteers who can attend to the religious needs of Native American, Wiccan and Rastafarian prisoners.

State legislators had assumed that volunteer ministries would jump in and help prisoners meet the ritual and devotional needs of their faiths. But so far that hasn't happened.

"It's been tough locating volunteers for those faith groups," said Brown, whose department lost 26 full-time prison chaplains as part of an effort to close a \$2.6 billion state budget gap.

Across the nation, religious life behind bars is changing as correctional departments face budget cuts along with other state agencies. Some states, like North Carolina, have seen outright cuts. In other states, hiring freezes mean vacancies instead of replacements for chaplains who die or retire.

Gary Friedman, spokesman for the American Correctional Chaplains Association, said his organization distributes brochures to explain to legislators who

are mulling over cuts the benefits of retaining correctional chaplains.

“Chaplains are getting caught up in all these budget reductions and staff reductions,” he said. “It’s going on all over the country.” Some states, such as Texas, were able to spare chaplains in the budget negotiations. But in other states, prison chaplains are seeing increasing workloads in tough economic times, even as the religious diversity of inmates continues to grow.

In California, where about 130 prison chaplains are currently employed, there are three dozen vacancies.

At the California Men’s Colony, a medium- and minimum-security prison in San Luis Obispo, Rabbi Lon Moskowitz, the Jewish chaplain, is helping fulfill the duties of a Muslim chaplain who died a few months ago.

During Passover and summer solstice observances, he said, some Jewish and Native American inmates were unable to attend communal events due to lockdowns in their yards prompted by budget-related shortages in guard staff.

“They had to observe their religious service within their assigned housing unit,” said Lt. Dean Spears, a spokesman for the facility.

Indiana’s prisons—which have nine vacancies among 37 chaplain positions—have had similar restrictions when overseen by skeleton crews at times when inmates might have attended chapel, said Stephen Hall, director of religious services for the Indiana Department of Correction.

When there’s a drastic cut in chaplains, as in North Carolina, questions arise about everyday religious concerns as well as special or weekly observances.

“Lay people tend to think chaplains perform services on holy days,” said D. Craig Horn, a North Carolina legislator who opposed his state’s chaplaincy cuts. “My view is a professional chaplain adds stability and has a tremendous impact on promoting calm and providing prisoners with counseling and direction.”

Having worked as a church volunteer helping prisoners prepare for the world outside, Horn also knows that volunteers aren’t trained to do the kind of multi-faith work that chaplains provide daily—whether it’s kosher meals for Jews, prayer rugs for Muslims or sage and sweet grass for American Indians to burn



as they offer praise to the Four Winds.

Pat Nolan, vice president of Prison Fellowship, said chaplains are the ones most likely to help inmates after riots, rapes and other traumatic incidents or to facilitate special requests—like a phone call from a relative near death.

“For the safety of the institution, it’s important that persons going through those horrible situations have someone to help them to defuse the situation,” he said. “Otherwise, tension can get really high or out of control.”

The well-being and safety of prisoners aren’t the only reasons to keep chaplains. There are legal issues too, state prison officials say.

The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 puts government agencies on alert that they can’t get in the way of the free religious practice of prisoners.

With no professional chaplains left in North Carolina’s medium- and minimum-security prisons, that legal requirement has become the biggest headache for Brown, the prison chaplaincy director.

Some worry that the civil rights of prisoners may be violated by volunteer Christian ministries that, however sincere, may also be motivated to make converts. “Inmates have a right to practice their faith while they’re incarcerated,” said Mark Reamer, a Roman Catholic priest who has celebrated mass at a Raleigh prison for the past 16 years. “Chaplains ensure a certain fairness.” —Yonat Shimron and Adelle M. Banks, RNS

REHABILITATION EFFORT: *Inmates at the prison in Sugar Land, Texas, celebrate graduation and baptisms along with daily life in the Christian Prison Unit served by InnerChange Freedom Initiative and Prison Fellowship.*

Prominent prison ministry fires 72, citing economy

Prison Fellowship, a prominent evangelical ministry to inmates, has laid off dozens of employees, citing the faltering economy.

A total of 72 staffers were let go as part of a restructuring that included new leaders as of July 18. Jim Liske, a former pastor in Michigan, is now the ministry’s CEO, and Garland Hunt, a former Atlanta pastor, is now its president.

“Like many nonprofits in the wake of this economy, Prison Fellowship has had to deal with shrinking resources and rising costs,” said Frank Lofaro, executive vice president of the ministry. The ministry was founded in 1976 by ex-convict and Nixon aide Chuck Colson.

Lofaro declined to disclose the current total number of Prison Fellowship staffers. “Prison Fellowship is not focusing on its recent staff reductions but rather on the new season it is embarking on for the ministry,” Lofaro said in a statement.

The ministry, which turned 35 in August, has worked with about 8,500 churches and 14,000 volunteers to support prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. —RNS

Religious restraints rose for 2 billion, study says

A third of the world—about 2.2 billion people—live in nations where restrictions on religion have substantially increased, according to a new report.

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life study, released August 9, also shows that intolerant countries are growing more hostile to religious freedom, and tolerant ones are becoming more accommodating.

“There seems to be somewhat of a polarization,” particularly in countries with constitutional prohibitions against blasphemy, said Brian Grim, the primary researcher of the report. “When you have one set of restrictions in place then it’s easier to add on.”

Nations with the greatest increases in government religious restrictions, ranked from most to least populous, included Egypt, France, Algeria, Uganda and Malaysia. Among those nations where government restrictions declined, ranked from most to least populous, were Greece, Togo, Nicaragua, the Republic of Macedonia and Guinea-Bissau.

The report, culling data from 198 countries and territories from 2006 through 2009, also measured social hostility toward religious groups. North Korea, one of the most repressive regimes, could not be included for lack of reliable data.

Though researchers collected statistics before the Arab Spring, they said the report may shed light on this year’s uprisings across the Middle East.

“It’s indisputable that increasing levels of restriction were part of the overall context within which the uprisings took place,” Grim said. “Whether they were the trigger or they were just part of this trend in societies is difficult to tease apart at this point.”

As other reports on religious freedom have found, it is scarcest in the Middle East and North Africa. But Europe, the study noted, has the largest proportion of countries where social hostilities related to religion rose. In France, for example, women are barred by law from wearing face-covering veils.

More than other groups, Muslims and Christians suffered harassment based on their religion. But Pew researchers noted that together, these groups comprise more than half the world’s population.

Smaller religious groups that suffered disproportionately, the study found, included Jews. Representing less than 1 percent of the world’s people, Jews were harassed in 75 countries.

Overall, about 70 percent of the world lives in nations with significant religious repression—a figure that matched that of a similar study Pew undertook two years ago. But the nations in which religious repression is increasing tend to be populous, the study’s authors noted. —Lauren Markoe, RNS

Army will host concert for atheists at Fort Bragg

A group of military atheists have won the backing of U.S. Army officials to hold a “Rock Beyond Belief” concert for non-believers at North Carolina’s Fort Bragg next year.

The victory came after several church-state separation watchdog groups complained in July to the secretary of the army that a Christian-themed concert held at the fort last September gave “selective benefits” to religious groups.

That concert, staged by the Billy

Graham Evangelistic Association, received more than \$50,000 in financial support from the base, according to records obtained by local atheists through the Freedom of Information Act. The nonreligious concert will receive the same funds and will be held at a similar venue at the base.

Hailing the decisions as a major victory, military atheists say they are on the “cusp of a major breakthrough.”

“This just might be the turning point in the foxhole atheist community’s struggle for acceptance, tolerance and respect,” Sgt. Justin Griffith, a member of Military Atheists and Secular Humanists (MASH), a Fort Bragg-based group that complained about the Christian concert, wrote August 2 on the “Rock Beyond Belief” website.

“Rock Beyond Belief” was originally slated to be held last April after Fort Bragg officials agreed to MASH’s original appeal for an alternative concert. But it was canceled in April when the garrison commander refused to sign off on it.

The American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and several atheist groups complained to army officials.

The “Rock Beyond Belief” concert will be held March 31, 2012, and will be free to all members of the military, their families and the public. It is slated to feature musical groups and speakers, including Richard Dawkins, a best-selling author and prominent atheist. —RNS

Unitarian leader convicted for role in protest

THE HEAD OF the Unitarian Universalist Association has been convicted on misdemeanor charges for participating in a protest rally against Arizona’s controversial immigration law.

Peter Morales, the first Latino president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, was found guilty on August 5 of failing to comply with a police officer at a July 2010 event where he and others blocked the entrance of the Maricopa County Jail in Phoenix.

“My conviction as a result of that civil disobedience in no way alters my commitment to opposing this legislation that targets and dehumanizes some of the most vulnerable among us,” said Morales, who is an ordained minister.

The protest—whose more than 1,500 participants included UUA members and representatives from local immigrant advocacy groups—criticized Arizona’s hotly debated immigration bill that was passed in April 2010. —RNS

Churches challenged on use of public schools

Every Sunday morning, P.S. 144 elementary school in Queens, like dozens of schools in New York City and thousands more nationwide, is transformed into a house of worship for a few hours, hosting the Forest Hills Community Church with its prefab pulpit and portable baptistery.

There's no tally of how many churches, synagogues and mosques convert public school spaces into prayer places. What's clear is that there has been a steady rise in numbers as congregations find schools to be available, affordable and accessible to families they want to reach.

Critics, including some courts, are concerned that these arrangements are an unconstitutional entanglement of church and state. They say these bargain permits effectively subsidize religious congregations that would have to pay much higher prices on the open market. They also note that the practice appears to favor Christian groups, which worship on Sundays—when school spaces are most often available.

Caught in the middle are congregations such as Forest Hills, which spent \$3,000 for a permit to use P.S. 144 from February through June and renewed for July and August. For September and beyond, however, nothing is certain.

The city's Department of Education, which has been trying for a decade to oust the congregations from its schools and end the weekend worship practice, won the latest legal round in June. As the case winds its way through more appeals, an injunction allows about 60 congregations to remain in place and the permit process to continue.

So the Forest Hills church's evangelical founder and pastor, Jeremy Sweeten, still rises early each Sunday, hitches up a 20-foot trailer and tows it to the school. The trailer, packed by PortableChurch.com, has every bit of paraphernalia needed to create a sanctuary and children's Bible classes.

By 10 a.m., the Assemblies of God congregation of about 60 adults is raising its voice in song and prayer. Then about 1 p.m., as swiftly as they came, they're gone, with every offering basket stowed and every Bible stashed away.

It's a familiar scene in many communities across the nation:

- *USA Today* reported on the five largest and five fastest-growing school districts in the continental U.S. and found that all ten had granted permits for religious congregations to hold weekend worship. New York City, the largest, is typical: Christian churches are the primary clients because Muslims and Jews worship on Fridays and Saturdays, when school spaces usually are used for student activities.

- The Acts 29 Network, a Seattle-based evangelical coalition that has started 350 churches across the nation in the past five years, estimates that about 16 percent of these meet in school spaces. "We don't have a hidden agenda. Our heart is to serve the community just like schools serve the community. . . . They're designed for large groups, and they've got parking," says Scott Thomas, Acts 29 president.

- A 2007 national survey of newly established Protestant churches found that 12 percent met in schools, according to LifeWay, a Nashville, Tennessee-based Christian research agency. LifeWay Director Ed Stetzer said the major draw is that startup congregations and expanding multisite churches can offer worship close to families' homes for a fraction of the cost of creating their own building.

However, Stetzer, who also leads church-planting efforts, said he sees the constitutional dangers. Stetzer said he cautions school districts that they will

have no control over the religious preaching and teaching. "So if a Wiccan coven [wanted a use permit], you would have to be as neutral as you would with an evangelical church. Even Westboro [the Topeka, Kansas, congregation that pickets funerals with signs denouncing gays] could move in and you would have no way to stop them," Stetzer said.

In the New York City case, the city school board's legal briefs argue that the practice "improperly advances religion" by, in effect, subsidizing the churches with facilities below market rate. It also shows "favoritism" to Christian churches as religions that don't worship on Sundays are generally shut out.

The Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed. In his June ruling, Judge Pierre Leval wrote that the Bronx Household of Faith, ensconced since 2002 in P.S. 15, "has made the school the place for the performance of its rites, and might well appear to have established itself there. The place has, at least for a time, become the church."

The Bronx church is seeking a rehearing. Jordan Lorence, senior counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, which represents the church, expects that the U.S. Supreme Court will overturn the ruling. "Religious groups, including churches, shouldn't be discriminated against simply because they want to rent a public building just like other groups can," Lorence said. —Cathy Lynn Grossman and Natalie DiBlasio, *USA Today*



CHURCH IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL: Pastor Jeremy Sweeten performs a baptism at the Forest Hills Community Church at Public School 144 in Queens, New York.

Bats in its belfry cause British church to close

A BELEAGUERED 11th-century church in England is losing its worshipers and has been forced to suspend services indefinitely because of bats in its belfry.

Bats are a protected species in Britain, and the Anglican St. Hilda's Church in Ellerburn, North Yorkshire, is trying—so far with no luck—to get a license to get rid of its share of them.

Churchwarden Liz Cowley said the bats have taken up residence in the church's upper regions and are making a mess of the place. "The walls and floors are covered with bat droppings," Cowley told the BBC. "We have tried

to keep the church clean, but we have lost the battle."

She added that "services have had to be canceled, and we cannot realistically open the church."

Ashley Burgess, a member of the local parish church council, said the congregation has raised £10,000 (about U.S. \$16,000) to build new roosts for the bats away from the main building, but they remain stubbornly entrenched in the church's upstairs.

"The financial cost has been huge," Burgess added. "Nobody wants to sit in a bat-stained church, and our congregation has dwindled as a result." —Al Webb, RNS

Priest won't stop push for women's ordination

The Roman Catholic priest who faces expulsion from the priesthood and his religious order for advocating for women priests is refusing to recant and has hired a church lawyer.

"What they're asking me to do is lie," Roy Bourgeois said in an interview on August 9 from his home in Columbus, Georgia. "To say I don't believe God calls women to the priesthood as well as men—I cannot do that."

In 2008 Bourgeois participated in a ceremony in Kentucky purporting to ordain Janice Sevre-Duszynska as a Catholic priest. The church said it was without effect, but that Bourgeois nonetheless incurred automatic excommunication by participating. That means he is cut off from the sacraments, although he remains a priest.

At the same time, a process began to unfold that could end with Bourgeois's forced laicization, or being stripped of his priesthood and expelled from the Maryknoll order, his home for 44 years.

Bourgeois's Maryknoll superior, Edward Dougherty, issued on July 27 the last written warning required by church law before sending Bourgeois's case to Rome. Dougherty advised Bourgeois he

would forward the case to Rome for laicization "if you fail to publicly recant and retract your stand on this issue of women's ordination" by August 11.

The Catholic Church teaches that Christ defined the priesthood as an all-male corps modeled on himself, and it is powerless to change that. Bourgeois said he has retained Tom Doyle, a Dominican priest famous for his support of sexual abuse victims and his criticisms of bishops, as his canon lawyer.

His defense is the primacy of his conscience and his right to dissent, Bourgeois said. But a friend and secular lawyer said August 9 he hoped that Bourgeois might retain his priesthood, short of recanting.

Bill Quigley, a law professor at Loyola University in New Orleans, said Bourgeois has promised his Maryknoll community that he will not participate again in rites purporting to ordain Catholic women to the priesthood—although not to recant or silence himself on the issue.

"An issue as important as this, we've got to be able at least to have dialogue without getting kicked out," Quigley said. Quigley notes that Bourgeois has attracted substantial support among fellow priests both within and outside the order—not necessarily for women's ordination, but for his right to offer his public opinion without loss of his priesthood.

Mike Virgintino, a Maryknoll spokesman, said that Dougherty months ago slow-tracked the process to give Bourgeois maximum time to reconsider his position.

Having taken a vow of poverty, Bourgeois has lived for years on a Maryknoll allowance in a small apartment near Fort Benning, Georgia. For 20 years he has protested against a military installation there once called the School of the Americas, now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

Virgintino said that if Bourgeois is expelled, the order will nonetheless continue to provide for him financially. —Bruce Nolan, RNS

Colleges apply for Obama's interfaith service program

More than 250 colleges, universities and seminaries have submitted plans to the White House for yearlong interfaith service projects in response to a campaign launched by the Obama administration.

Joshua DuBois, director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said officials had hoped for 100 participants.

"They don't have to agree about their different beliefs, but we feel like they can agree on issues of service and strengthening our communities," he said August 2. "And so many of them are responding and saying . . . we want to take you up on this challenge."

Projects range from that of Adrian College, a United Methodist-related school in Michigan, which will combat sex trafficking, to that of Southern Utah University, a state-supported school, which will help hungry families.

The "campus challenge," which was launched in March, grew out of recommendations from advisers to DuBois's office who called for projects on more than 500 U.S. campuses by the end of 2012.

Eboo Patel, president of Interfaith Youth Core and one of the advisers, said he was pleased with the diversity of the participating schools. —RNS

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, September 11

Exodus 14:19–31

THIS YEAR the lectionary texts will be heard on the tenth anniversary of 9/11. It will be hard for many preachers and congregants to hear this pivotal scripture from Exodus above the rat-tat-tat rhetoric of partisanship and triumphalism that still grips our culture at the end of the first post-9/11 decade.

In contrast, I remember the first Sunday after 9/11, a deeply painful day when churches everywhere were filled to capacity with brokenhearted people grieving and praying and hoping for a faithful word from brokenhearted preachers. But that season of crisis and public mourning was brief, and strong cultural forces were soon at work coaxing the national mood out of its rhythm of lament.

Over time, many churches took their cue from the surrounding culture and slipped into a season of vengeance that has been hard to shake. The dangerous temptation as we revisit the horrifying memories—especially with the still fresh news of the capture and assassination of Osama bin Laden on our minds—is to identify ourselves too easily with the Israelites who pass unharmed through the Red Sea while their pursuers, the Egyptians, are drowned. “Horse and rider [God] has thrown into the sea” will be heard by some this year with a smug and premature literalism. It will be a shame if we interpret this text of deliverance through a lens that’s far more exclusive than God’s lens.

Amid the images delivered up by this text, the one that most captures me this year is the pillar of fire and cloud. Can this image help us plumb a truth that comes with the gift of ten years’ time? We will remember the pillar of fire and cloud that billowed out of the World Trade Center and up into a blue September sky. But it may be harder to recall that beneath it all, in the streets of New York, it was not the pursuing enemy that was running in panic; it was us. Everything we thought we knew about living in this world—our way of life, our place in the catbird seat, our sense of power, the truth of our causes—was running in panic, and still is. On that day it was our enemies, not us, who were singing and dancing for joy.

In Exodus, the pillar of fire and cloud separated enemies. There’s something powerful in that. “It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night” (Exod. 14:20). Wrapped up in this story is everything we ever need to know—as well as everything we most certainly will never know—about the judging and

redeeming drama of God’s presence in our midst. Dwelling up there within the utter mystery of the fire and the cloud that separates Israelites from Egyptians is an unpredictable God—not a God who is endlessly biased toward one people at the expense of another, but a God who is steadfastly preoccupied with a gracious horizon that we cannot comprehend. God is, quite simply, bigger than us and our agendas.

What is truly baffling about God is that the pillar of fire and cloud not only separates enemies but ultimately connects them.

A few months ago I read an amazing story. Through an unlikely series of coincidences, a retired American pilot named Dan Cherry found the F-4 Phantom fighter jet that he had piloted decades ago when he served two tours of duty in Southeast Asia; it was sitting junked and neglected in a thicket of weeds outside a VFW club somewhere in the Midwest. The sight of the plane took him back to April 1972. In a dogfight with a North Vietnamese Russian-made MiG-21, he fired a heat-seeking rocket that blew the wing off of the enemy plane. Cherry recalled seeing the plane’s pilot with his arms broken, ejecting himself from the plane and parachuting to the ground 30 miles outside of Hanoi.

Years later, the memory launched Cherry on a search for the North Vietnamese pilot, and in 2008 Cherry found him in Ho Chi Minh City. “Welcome to my country,” Nguyen Hong My said. “Glad to see you are in good health. I hope we can be friends.” Cherry went to the man’s home for dinner, met his family and held his one-year-old grandson. Later Hong My returned the favor and visited Cherry in the United States. Dying to their old selves, two former enemies were reborn as friends.

In a sermon published in *Journal for Preachers*, Albert C. Winn told an old Hasidic tale. According to a rabbi, the angels were rejoicing over the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea—playing their harps, singing and dancing. “Wait,” said one of them. “Look, the Creator of the Universe is sitting there weeping!” They approached God and asked, “Why are you weeping when Israel has been delivered by your power?” “I am weeping,” said the Maker of the Universe, “for the dead Egyptians washed up on the shore—somebody’s sons, somebody’s husbands, somebody’s fathers” (“A Way Out of No Way: Exodus 14:5–31”).

It is time for us to preach this text from the vast and gracious perspective of One who—way up there in the midst of fire and cloud—is not rejoicing at anyone’s victory but instead weeping at everyone’s loss. Maybe those tears help form that sustaining cloud of deliverance and purpose—a cloud that not only separates enemies but also connects them.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, September 18

Exodus 16:2–15

WHEN WE SPEAK of manna from heaven, we usually do so with a big helping of irony. In our time, the term has come to mean “something that’s unheard of and unachievable.”

As a seminary president, I sometimes sit with a donor and describe this or that new building or new faculty chair in the hope that the person will be moved to spectacular generosity. Occasionally I receive a skeptical question instead: “How do you expect to pay for this—with manna from heaven?” Manna from heaven, we think, is as likely to fall into our laps as pigs are likely to fly.

If we have misunderstood this text from Exodus, maybe we can be forgiven for it. Exodus is, after all, a catalogue of extraordinary things—the burning bush, the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, the glory of God entering the tabernacle—it’s as if the point of Exodus is to spoil us with evidence of the extraordinary ways in which God interacts with God’s people.

But the provision of manna is a plain, homely gesture. In the face of complaints from the hungry Israelites who are longing for the fleshpots of Egypt, God acts and provides them with (drum roll, please) . . . bread. There are no fancy pyrotechnics, no strobe lights or fog machines, but just the daily provision of one of the most basic staples of life, something that will get them from today to tomorrow.

In Terry Fretheim’s commentary on Exodus, he offers an explanation for this bread that corroborates its everyday ordinariness. In the Sinai Peninsula, “a type of plant lice punctures the fruit of the tamarisk tree and excretes a substance from this juice, a yellowish-white flake or ball. During the warmth of the day it disintegrates, but it congeals when it is cold. It has a sweet taste. Rich in carbohydrates and sugar, it is still gathered by natives, who bake it into a kind of bread.” Maybe that’s all there is to it. But in the story, for people hungry enough to notice, this ordinary food—given to them day by day as a completely unearned gift—is linked with the miraculous generosity of God. It is right that the people perk up at the sight of it and ask, “What is it?” What is this extraordinarily ordinary thing which God gives us in such abundance?

It is bread, a homely example of the smorgasbord of giftedness that surrounds us. Such giftedness does not save itself for mountaintop moments but rains on us constantly. “Give us this day our daily bread,” we say in the Lord’s Prayer, as we acknowledge that

we depend on the grace of a gracious God whose provisions never fail—unlike our attempts at providing for ourselves.

We preach to people who, like the Israelites in the wilderness, are either so preoccupied by past experience or so anxious about the future that they are often unable to see the graces available to them in the present moment. They are unlikely to ask the incredulous, grateful question: “What is this?”

In the Lowcountry of South Carolina, there is an old Gullah term for early morning: *dayclean*, as in “Child, you’ve got to go to bed because dayclean’s coming.” The point is that every new day is “clean”—a blank slate upon which the story of new mercies yet undiscovered might be written. If we are not preoccupied by the past or troubled by the future, we will see the day for the miraculous thing that it is—in the face of the child sitting at the breakfast table, or in the gift of work to do and the opportunity to do it well, or in friends who shoulder our pleasures and burdens with us and help make them meaningful. Nothing special—just ordinary gifts around us that enable us to get from today to tomorrow.

I am a huge fan of Alexander McCall Smith’s series of books chronicling the adventures of the No. 1 Ladies’ Detective

God’s manna—bread—is a homely example of the giftedness around us.

Agency. They are delightful doxologies about life in Botswana, especially as expressed by the eminently sensible protagonist, Precious Ramotswe—a “lady detective” who solves crimes. In one book, Smith captures her in a reflective moment.

It was late summer, and there had been good rains that year. This was important, as good rains meant productive fields, and productive fields meant large, ripened pumpkins. . . . The yellow flesh of a pumpkin or a squash, boiled and then softened with a lump of butter (if one’s budget stretched to that), was one of God’s greatest gifts to Botswana. (*The Full Cupboard of Life*)

Sometimes recognizing the evidence of the most basic, ordinary, daily examples of God’s miraculous manna in our midst, upon which we simply depend, is about as simple—and as profound—as that.

The author is Theodore J. Wardlaw, president and professor of homiletics at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas.

Faith forming faith

by Paul E. Hoffman

KATHRYN WAS IN HER forties when she first came to our congregation. She said she was looking for “something spiritual.” As it happened, we had something specific to offer her: a place in our catechumenate. For 15 years, the congregation had offered a yearlong intentional time of faith formation. As a result, a loving sponsor, a caring catechist and a committed congregation walked alongside Kathryn as she explored what it means to follow Jesus.

The catechumenal process includes weekly meetings on Sunday evening. After a family-style meal, candidates and their sponsors gather into small groups for Bible study. These sessions focus on the preaching text for Sunday morning, on the life of faith that is modeled in the scriptures and on the questions that inquirers bring: Who is Jesus? What is prayer, and why pray? How do the stories of scripture apply to my life?

In Lent, the candidates and their sponsors stand before the congregation each Sunday to receive the community’s prayers and support. They receive gifts representing Christian worship and formation—a hymnal, a copy of the creed and a catechism. These public rites offer candidates the final opportunity for discernment prior to being baptized or renewing their baptism at the Easter Vigil.

Soon after Kathryn was baptized, the congregation held a forum to consider inviting Tent City to spend three months encamped on the church’s front lawn, beginning just a few weeks before Christmas. Tent City is a well-organized long-standing coalition of self-governing homeless people who have banded together for safety, community and advocacy. They refer to themselves as “houseless,” not “homeless.”

The city of Seattle permits the hundred or so residents of Tent City to encamp within the city limits, but only at places to which they have been invited and for no longer than 90 days in any one spot. It has fallen largely to the churches of Seattle to be the advocates and hosts of Tent City.

The possibility of our church hosting Tent City was raised the previous spring, after some kids in the church and their parents had taken a field trip to a neighboring church that was hosting Tent City. On the way home, a still, small voice spoke through the mouth of a third-grader: “Pastor, when can we have Tent City at our church?”

Six months later, the idea of hosting Tent City was gaining momentum, but it was by no means obvious that we would do this. Our well-manicured block-long property on the summit of Phinney Ridge is one of the few green spaces in the neighbor-

hood. Even the most imaginative and liberal proponent of the gospel understood that people living in adjoining million-dollar-view homes would not instantly embrace our invitation to the houseless.

In preparation for the forum and in expectation of hearing well-reasoned and well-intentioned objections to hosting Tent City, the staff and leadership had discussed our strategy: be good listeners, remain nonanxious, offer insights, don’t get into

Our congregation wasn’t prepared for Kathryn’s challenge to our faith.

a power struggle. Most of all, point to the mandates of scripture and stay grounded in the treasure of our Lutheran theology—God’s unconditional grace for all. We had even gone so far as to rehearse responses to those who might threaten to leave our congregation, should we choose to move ahead and invite our brothers and sisters in Christ who live in Tent City to join us for the holy days of Christmas and into a new year.

We hadn’t prepared ourselves, however, for the newly baptized Kathryn. After listening to the conversation at the congregational forum, Kathryn stood and took a deep breath.

“I can’t believe the objections that I’m hearing to this opportunity,” she said. “I can’t believe them because, as I was preparing for my baptism last year, this is what you told me that being a baptized child of God would mean. You told me that to be a disciple of Christ meant to care for those less fortunate—to reach out to those in need and to share God’s love with all people. That’s what you taught me it means to be a baptized disciple of Jesus.”

Then Kathryn said the most amazing thing of all, the thing that none of us had anticipated hearing and for which none of us had rehearsed a response.

“So if we decide that we can’t invite Tent City to be on our front lawn, I will have to leave this congregation. If Tent City can’t be here, then I can’t either, because what you have taught

Paul E. Hoffman is pastor at Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle. He is working on a book on the adult catechumenate.

me about who we are as the people of God and what it means to be one of you will not be true.”

The room fell silent. For all intents and purposes, the conversation was over. To be sure, there were still opponents to address and details to be worked out. But in that single moment of testimony, God spoke to us through Kathryn. As 1 Corinthians 5:17 promises, the old had passed away and the new had come. In Christ we were made a new creation. The voice of that third-grader three months prior was now amplified by the voice of a new adult child of God.

Had Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church not been a congregation practicing the adult catechumenate, we would not have been ready to reach out and welcome Tent City. Nor would we have been ready to welcome Harrison.

Harrison hadn't been to church in years. He came at the advice of his oncologist. Having been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, his doctor counseled that he “get his affairs in order.” Among other things, this meant for Harrison a reexamination of a long-abandoned faith.

Harrison too found a place in our catechumenate. Recruiting an appropriate sponsor for Harrison was a challenge of pastoral care. His sponsor would need to be someone solid in his own faith, loving and caring in skills of listening and support and emotionally well balanced. We knew that the human bonds that were forged in this relationship would soon be torn apart by death. Walter was the perfect choice. He had himself come into our congregation recently and had made the year-long walk of faith formation.

It certainly is the case that all of us are dying. But Harrison's participation as a catechumen that year brought an intensified poignancy and urgency to contemplating death, especially among those who were preparing for baptism. For those sitting side by side with him in Sunday evening Bible studies, the words typically used to describe baptism had an added edge. Consider St. Paul's teaching in Romans 6: if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Christ. And again, so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.

By the time that Harrison affirmed his baptism, nine months after first coming to our church and asking for our help in preparing him for all that lay ahead of him, he was surrounded by a community of faith that knew him, loved him and supported him in ways that none of us could have imagined beforehand. Months later, a year after he first stepped into our assembly for worship, the community gathered for his funeral and commended not a stranger but a brother in Christ into the care of Almighty God.

All of us who knew him, who walked in the way of Christ with him and who suffered with him, found renewal, hope and strength in that connection. Our journey of faith together, along with our shared prayers, insights, fellowship and service, strengthened our Christian community. What happens in the catechumenal journey permeates our ministry. It is not only the candidates who are formed in faith but all of us, over and over again.

Bringing people to faith through baptismal preparation has been much more than a way to gain new members for the




church. It has opened our eyes to a new way of being the people of God. Forming others in faith has formed us for ministry and outreach.

A friend tells the story of a woman who had never before had a relationship with Christ or his body, the church, yet for years she had visited the local jail, simply because she felt called to do it. Through a small group Bible study she came to see her visitation at the jail in a new way: she saw herself ministering because Christ had called her to this ministry.

Meanwhile, the members of her Bible study were learning to take a risk that they had never before taken. At her encouragement, they came with her to the jail. Eventually, the six members of the group became a vibrant ministry in the jail.

This sort of formation—faith forming faith—can happen anywhere. Phinney Ridge is not an extraordinary place. We are a typical neighborhood church facing many of the challenges that affect other congregations a decade into the new millennium. Less than 10 percent of the population around us claims any formal affiliation with a faith community. Fifteen years ago, when we began the practice of forming new Christians for baptismal living, not many congregations believed that their communities of faith could benefit from such a ministry. But the creeping tide of secularism, the growing mistrust of institutionalized faith and the general decline of churches all underscore the importance of having an intentional process of faith formation.

Our catechumenal story is the story of how, through the baptismal preparation of new Christians, we as a congregation are formed in faith and strengthened for mission. We were formed by Kathryn's courage to accept Tent City into our lives. We were formed by getting to know the residents of Tent City, which gave us the courage to look for additional ways to reach out to those in need. And we were formed by Harrison and his humble walk back into the arms of God.

Faith forming faith is a circular miracle. By leaning out in love and trust to those who are seeking Christ, we have discovered what the scriptures have promised us all along. The gifts that one offers in leading a new Christian to baptism are gifts that immerse all of us more richly and fully in the love of God. 

Faith is not a personal relationship

A friend in Jesus?

by John Suk

DURING A YEARLONG journey through North America, my wife and I attended many different churches. One of them was a Methodist church in rural Louisiana. Early in the worship service the pastor insisted—not once but several times—that “the meaning and purpose of life is to have a personal relationship with Jesus.”

The claim irked me. As a child I was taught, in keeping with the Reformed bent of my tradition, that the purpose of human life was found in the cultural mandate: it encourages us to rule the garden and love each other to the glory of God (Gen. 1:26). This take on the meaning and purpose of life suggested that creation was somehow incomplete and culturally raw, and both needed to make progress to become all that God wanted them to be. In a sense, the cultural mandate made humans co-regents, even cocreators with God.

At the same time, I was also taught that Christians were supposed to seek justice and defend the cause of the poor, the widows and the fatherless (Isa. 1:17). Jesus himself taught that the purpose of life is to love God above all and our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:36–40). These notions, as honest as they were about human failure, also spurred great bouts of institution-building as we sought through political action groups and church relief agencies to do just these things, in as thoughtful and effective a manner as we could imagine and plan. Jesus also taught—and most of the New Testament illustrates—how Christians are supposed to make disciples and teach them how to obey Jesus; in other words, we were taught that we were supposed to grow the church as an institution. But I never heard while I was growing up, though it may have been whispered, that Christians were supposed to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Such talk would have struck us as soft—probably Pentecostal.

And yet this sort of language is now very common, even among Christians in the Reformed tradition. I think they take their cue, in part, from the tenor of evangelical Christianity. Rick Warren says: “This is what God wants most from you: a relationship!” Henry Blackaby, in *Experiencing God*, writes: “Knowing God . . . is a relationship with a Person. It is an intimate love relationship with God.” A *Newsweek*/Beliefnet poll suggests that 75 percent of Americans say that a “very important” reason for their faith is to “forge a personal relationship with God.”

At the outset, I should say that there is a way of interpreting these words that makes some grammatical sense, though this isn’t the sense in which most evangelicals use them. That is,

according to orthodox Christian doctrine, Jesus is a person, both human and divine. Thus, when we relate to Jesus the person—through prayer perhaps, or through obedience to his command to love God and neighbor, or even by accepting the proposition that he died so that we could live—it might be said that we have a personal relationship with him. But I don’t think that’s what most people mean when they say they have a personal relationship with Jesus. Most often people use the phrase “personal relationship” in a much plainer sense: they mean that they relate to Jesus very much like they relate to other people they know.

Philip Yancey’s discussion of a personal relationship with God is a good example of this common usage, but also of its problems. In his book *Reaching for the Invisible God*, Yancey echoes a long list of evangelical leaders since the Great Awakening by describing a personal relationship with Jesus as if it really were a “two people physically in the same room experience.” Yancey writes that “getting to know God” is a lot like getting to know a person: “You spend

The Bible speaks powerfully about God’s absence as well as God’s presence.

time together, whether happy or sad. You laugh together. You weep together. You fight and argue, then reconcile.”

But a little later he notes that this is not as easy as it sounds. Jesus is not, after all, physically present. So Yancey adds that with God we shouldn’t expect a relationship between equals. The problem, he says, is that we want God to be like us—tangible, material, perceptible, audible—while God “shows little interest in corresponding on our level.” But if God shows little interest in corresponding on our level, then how do we spend time together, laugh together, weep together, fight and argue and reconcile? Why would you call such a relationship a personal relationship?

John Suk is former editor of the Banner, the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. This article is adapted from his book Not Sure: A Pastor’s Journey from Faith to Doubt, just published by Eerdmans.

To give Yancey full credit, he does feel the weight of these awkward questions. He tries to resolve the problem through indirection. A relationship with God, he says, is like a relationship with a spouse you love but are not with. You miss your spouse; your heart grows fonder, so much so that you feel the absence of the spouse as a sort of presence. Well, perhaps. But again, this absence of someone you love as a mysterious presence sounds more like postmodern rhetorical criticism, like a search for what is lost in the traces, than the sort of personal relationship Yancey began by describing.

As pervasive as the language of personal relationship has become, it confuses many Christians. As a pastor, I met quite a few people who experienced doubt, or perhaps anger, because they didn't experience Jesus the way their Christian friends seemed to. They can't say they've felt his presence, listened to his voice or argued with him. After a while they begin to feel left out, like the only person at a Pentecostal worship service who isn't speaking in tongues. I've counseled people who are caught between worship that wasn't connecting for them and a spouse for whom exactly the same kind of worship was the sine qua non of life. They feel deficient, as if they're missing something essential to their well-being. And they feel like frauds, because the very frequency and offhand familiarity of personal-relationship-with-God-talk creates rhetorical pressure to conform, to nod, to say, "Yes, I know what you mean," when they don't, and to act as if such a relationship is the universal reality of all Christians.

The language of personal relationship with Jesus has at least as much to do with secular culture's influence on Christianity as it has to do with the Bible. Charles Taylor notes that "a striking feature of the Western march toward secularity is that it has been interwoven from the start with this drive toward personal religion, as has frequently been remarked." Robert Bellah argues that the language of personal relationship flourished especially when, in the 19th century, "science seemed to have dominated the explanatory schemas of the external world, [and in response] morality and religion took refuge in human subjectivity, in feeling and sentiment." By this account, the triumph of science meant that faith had to make a strategic retreat to private experience.

Indeed, today's society is one in which experience and feeling reign. A religion freed from some of the rational and linear constraints of modernity becomes

uncritical in its choice of sources, authority or even good sense. Syncretism leading to "designer religions" is common. As religion retreats from the world of linear rationality, it seeks a home in experience.

Our society is individualistic and competitive at home, at work and in the public square. People can easily feel beat up. Our society is also a materialistic one, full of cars and furniture and boats and clothes and toys. Yet none of these things satisfies our longing to get in touch with that genuine trace of God's divine image that still exists deep inside each of us. These days everyone longs for a divine connection that will ease the pain

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of their human dislocation in the midst of so much material plenty. We are waifs when it comes to meaning, unable to engage the accumulated wisdom that can be found in any library or tradition. Instead, we look for it in endless miles of shopping mall corridors or computer game avatars. Since we have eternity set in our hearts, we want an epiphany: we want to experience God. And I suspect that that longing is enough for a lot of people to mistake just about any intuition or good thought or warm fuzziness as being Jesus.

The bottom line is that the huge emphasis that contempo-

rary evangelicals put on a great personal experience of and with Jesus has little or nothing to do with scripture and everything to do with taking from our culture what it thinks human happiness is all about.

So what does scripture say about personal relationships with God? On the one hand, scripture speaks powerfully about the providential nearness of God. God is David's shepherd and restores his soul (Ps. 23). God promises Israel that when it passes through waters or fire, "I will be with you" (Isa. 43:1-5). Similarly, Jesus promises that where two or three come together in his name, he will also be there (Matt. 18:20). While Paul is in Corinth, Jesus appears to him in a vision and promises him safety, saying "for I am with you" (Acts 18:10), much as he promises to be with the apostles to the end of the age as they teach and baptize (Matt. 28:20).

In a different vein, however, Jesus suggests that he is most present to us when we receive others in a Christlike manner. "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. . . . And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:40-42).

The Bible also speaks often about God's distance. Notwithstanding Psalm 23, God's presence to David was not so personal that God was able to advise him about Bathsheba or counting soldiers or how to raise Absalom. And the prophets insist on God's providential presence in Israel because the Israelites themselves cannot sense it, as they stumble from one disaster to another.

The Gospel of John actually wrestles with what the personal absence of Jesus will mean for his followers. "I am with you for only a short time," says Jesus, "and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come" (John 7:33-34, 8:21). It sounds like Jesus is saying that we cannot have a personal relationship with him in anything like the way we assume we will have personal relationships with anyone else.

God's presence, even when, according to the Exodus story, it is experienced directly, also happens to be ambiguous and hard to trust. When the pillar of fire by night and cloud by day accompanied

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Israel to the Promised Land, speaking loudly of God's presence, Israel did not trust in God or make a choice for obedience because of that. In the New Testament, God came to humans in the flesh—in the form of Jesus—but it was so ambiguous a presence that, at the time Jesus walked on the Earth, few recognized him. Even the disciples, who had the closest of personal relationships with Jesus, barely understood him until after the resurrection.

We must make sure that worship experiences are connected to our tradition's deepest wells.

In the absence of Jesus, who has ascended into heaven, we do have something else, of course: the presence of the Holy Spirit, which was made known to us at Pentecost. Jesus says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). But as a spirit, the Holy Spirit's interaction with us is also ephemeral. Jesus makes a point of telling us that, though the Spirit is real and powerful, it does not make itself known to us 24/7. "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where

it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

The sum of the matter, as far as the Bible goes, is this: We have a kind of relationship with God: he is the creator, we are the creatures; Jesus the savior, we the saved; the Spirit reveals the truth, but only if we read scripture. While scripture claims that God longs to embrace us and has set in motion Christ events that will allow him to do just that, we live before the consummation. We try to interpret scripture correctly, but our differing interpretations have split the church into thousands of splinters. We want to love perfectly, but anger, misunderstanding and fear drive us apart. We pray every day for peace in the Middle East and elsewhere, but for 2,000 years those prayers have gone mostly unanswered. We want the same kind of personal relationship with Jesus that we have with a beloved spouse or child, but it is something we cannot have.

We must come to grips with the fact that "personal relationship" means many different things to nearly everybody by acknowledging this variance in our homes, churches and denominations. I am not a great fan of James Fowler's six-stage approach to faith, but it seems to me that his work is, at the very least, a reminder that not everyone is at the same place when it comes to faith, and we need to work with that by avoiding generalizations about what a personal relationship with God has to be. We especially need to avoid the trap of making



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some fellow believers feel less than Christian, or uncool, or overly holy or whatever, because they have not experienced the right kind of personal relationship. As Christians, we also need to come to terms with God's absence. Jesus is not present in the flesh. God has not rearranged the stars to say, "I exist." One presumes that it would be easy for him to do so.

And as far as we can see, Jesus is also not present to prevent human suffering. I've tried to be a pastor to parents who have just had a child with Down syndrome. After a car accident, I had to officiate at the funeral of a man's wife and only child. I've seen hundreds of rotting bodies—victims of genocide—in a little church in Nterama, Rwanda. And readers will all have their own stories to add. For such situations we need to recover the psalmist's language of lament: "You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend" (Ps. 88:18). And here ends the psalm, the psalmist's fist raised to heaven, because God certainly is not present. In a world full of suffering, injustice and inequity, we need more of the psalmists who cry out to God with raised fist because he seems absent than we need people glibly speaking about their personal relationship with God.

We need to recover the psalmist's language of lament because it fairly represents how we should feel about Jesus' absence till he comes again to make all things new. This is especially true for our young people. We all know the dual

phenomena of young people desiring both reassuring and intense experiences, including intense and reassuring worship experiences. Leonard Sweet describes "postmodern pilgrims" as people who not only want "all is well with my soul" worship, but also worship that cries out to God to come again and make all things new, because they are not all right now. I'm not against experience; I just want to make sure that it is con-

The language of faith invites us to ponder mystery.

nected to our tradition's deepest wells rather than individual and subjective interpretations of feelings that are characteristic not of faith, but of our culture's inability to delve deep or long.

Interestingly enough, it isn't just older folks who question contemporary worship's inability to take place in anything other than praise mode. Seventeen-year-old Marjorie Corbman recently wrote a surprise evangelical bestseller titled *A Tiny Step Away from Deepest Faith*. She comments on her use of an old Christian liturgy for morning prayers: "I gush over the liturgy, over a thousand years old, to whoever will listen . . . [including] Christians of various denominations sick of

FOR THE STUDY AND RENEWAL OF WORSHIP

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contemporary Christian music that can sound more like love ballads than hymns of worship.”

Finally, what about the language of faith? In an odd way, saying you have a personal relationship with Jesus makes faith unnecessary, doesn't it? And given scripture's overwhelming interest in faith, to the complete exclusion of insisting that one have a personal relationship with God, what I'd really like to see is a revival in the language of faith. I would like to suggest that rather than saying, "I have a personal relationship with Jesus," we say instead, "I believe in Jesus." Or, at least, "I try to believe in Jesus."

The bottom line is that faith is what we need precisely when there isn't the black-and-white certainty that goes with a personal relationship, as most people understand such things. Unlike Thomas, we who believe today are blessed when we have not ever seen Jesus or heard his voice or touched his wounds (John 20:29). In the end we are blessed because, though we don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, we believe anyway. This is the language of the Beatitudes; in fact, I sometimes think of the blessing Jesus gave Thomas as the ninth Beatitude. People who have not seen and yet believe—people of faith—are like the poor, those who hunger, those who weep and those who are persecuted. They are in a very tough spot. They are experiencing the fallout of sin in a broken world. But somehow they are getting along anyway. They are blessed because the kingdom of God will one day be all in all. But not now. And they cannot miracu-

lously evade the experience of Jesus' absence and the conviction his absence requires by claiming a personal relationship. Faith, writes Hendrik Berkhof, "contains the notion of distance between the deity and man. . . . It suggests a reaching beyond experience, even a holding on against experience; it speaks of a trust which can at times become totally blind; and it has the undertone of the 'not yet,' of living by a promise."

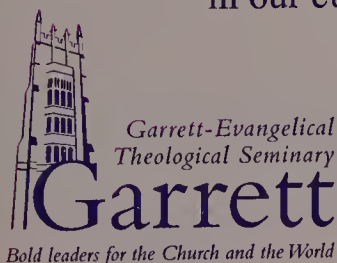
So where the language of personal relationship has a very questionable pedigree rooted in secular pressures to demythologize God, as well as a therapeutic culture that wants to turn God into a warm fuzzy, the language of faith is deeply rooted in scripture. Whereas the language of personal relationship is always ambiguous and inexact, meaning whatever the speaker happens to privately mean, the language of faith is deeply examined, as 2,000 years of reflection and shelf after shelf of books in any theological library will attest. Whereas the language of personal relationship sounds, on the face of it, implausible or perhaps even impossible (at least as far as the plain sense of such language goes), the language of faith serves as an invitation to ponder mystery and overcome unbelief. The apostle John put it this way: "This is [God's] command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (1 John 3:23). Faith—whether as intellectual assent or trust or a concrete love for whoever is your neighbor of the hour—is Christ's own invitation to get into a proper relationship with him.

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Yesterday's language

by Gail Ramshaw

BECAUSE I AFFIRM the unity of the body of Christ, I consider that the health of one arm affects the entire body. Thus I am either strengthened or weakened by the worship style of other Christians. For decades I've worked as a lay Lutheran toward making the words of Christian worship *communally approved, biblically inspired, theologically alive and masterfully crafted*. Given these convictions, I say with sadness that the new English translation of the Roman Catholic Order of Mass, mandated by the Vatican to be inaugurated this Advent, wounds not only many of my Catholic friends but also me.

Let me apply these four goals not only to the forthcoming Roman Catholic rite but also to texts used by many Protestant churches.

Words communally approved: Communal approval, as I see it, is achieved by means of a decadelong process involving open questionnaires, diverse committees, scholarly input, theological scrutiny, trial rites, genuine review, prudent revision, a concluding convention vote and denominationally supported education. Yet the new Roman Order of Mass has been smashed down upon the heads of dozens of eminent and skilled word-smiths who since 1966 have labored to translate the Latin rite into English. The promised communal process was replaced by hierarchical control. Nobody claims that the words of the newly authorized translation are communally approved.

In countless Protestant churches also one finds that the staff or a single minister will compose texts for Sunday. Worshipers are expected to speak with their whole heart words that they have never laid eyes on.

Any new worship text embodies some reform agenda. Was the agenda communally approved? The 2001 Vatican document "Liturgiam Authenticam" describes some of the Roman agenda—and far from being communally affirmed, the Vatican's literalist theory of translation has been criticized by many linguists. Furthermore, much of the Vatican agenda is an unspoken conservative rejection of some recent theological and liturgical developments, a counterreform that recalls the Council of Trent.

And then I wonder: have those ministers who construct their own liturgies clearly articulated their several agendas, and do at least their congregations approve these directions?

How wide is the envisioned Christian community? Much 20th-century liturgical renewal resulted from ecumenical cooperation in which different traditions learned from each other and collaborated on common projects. I am particularly saddened that the new Roman translation reflects a recent Vatican

decision to heighten its denominational distinctiveness by rejecting use of ecumenical translations of shared texts such as the Lord's Prayer and the creeds.

Yet all Christians should be concerned when their narrow denominational identity or preferred personal piety outshouts an emerging ecumenical consensus. I think, for example, of those Protestants who, tediously repeating what the 16th-century Reformers said about the medieval Roman canon, refuse to pray a biblically rich Great Thanksgiving at the eucharistic table, even though a century of ecumenical scholarship concurs that *eucharistia*, the "thanksgiving," is best served by a substantial prayer in which God is praised for the Earth,

**Every new worship text
embodies some personal
or group agenda.**

for centuries of the beloved stories of salvation, for the meal of Christ's body and for the continuous infusion of the Holy Spirit.

Words biblically inspired: That Christians assemble around the word of God as found in a perpetually retranslated Bible raises many issues. Which biblical terminology is necessary for the proclamation of the mystery of Christ? In each language, which words and images best express that biblical vocabulary? How much biblical literacy ought we expect of worshipers? When is a biblical reference inaccessible and thus merely mystifying?

The new Roman translation of the prayer before communion, "Lord, I am not worthy," now adds "that you should enter under my roof." The text assumes that worshipers know the story of the centurion in Luke 7. The intent is noble, the educational task enormous.

In the new Roman rite, the second option for the eucharistic prayer asks the Spirit to be sent down "like the dewfall." In the Hebrew scriptures, I count more than a dozen instances of dew as a metaphor for divine blessings (e.g., Hosea 14:5). Yet I doubt that most of the students I taught at a Catholic university know what "dewfall" is or, since their terrain does not rely on dew for fertility, would find it a powerful image of divine transformation.

Gail Ramshaw has written widely on liturgical language. Her book *Treasures Old and New* discusses images in the lectionary readings.



And how do all of us cast, for example, the New Testament imagery of becoming slaves of Christ, beyond softening the noun to *servants*? And have we enriched our liturgy with the countless images for God and the sacraments that we can borrow from the Psalms?

Is the Bible rendered so as to support denominational preferences? Maintaining a traditional translation can inhibit responsibly attending to biblical meaning. That the Catholic Church continues to cast the words of institution in the future tense — “which will be given up for you,” “which will be poured out for you” — exemplifies this tendency.

For a Protestant example of this resistance, consider that seminaries have long taught that the Lord's Prayer is a plea for

the coming of God's kingdom, and thus the translation “lead us not into temptation” misrepresents the eschatological intention of Matthew's and Luke's reference to the “time of trial” (NRSV), the “final test” (NAB). So why have so few Protestants adopted the more biblically faithful 1988 English Language Liturgical Consultation translation of the Lord's Prayer, which pleads “save us from the time of trial”?

Words theologically alive: In the new Roman text, the theology expressed in the original Latin is the approved belief, and its hierarchical depiction of the church and the Earth is maintained. In a reactionary move, the rubric “the sign of communion is more complete when given under both kinds” is to become “if any are present who are to receive Holy

The archaisms suggest that God is old-fashioned.

Communion under both kinds. . . .” The response to “the Lord be with you” is now to be rendered “and with your spirit,” a change that has been defended as appropriately referring to a higher “spirit” conferred on the clergy at ordination. But is it theologically helpful to be reminded of ecclesiastical status at the time when we greet one another in the Risen Christ?

All of us must inquire which century governs our worship.

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Words masterfully crafted: Most worship includes various levels of language: elevated, colloquial and somewhere between. With my national church, I maintain that each of these levels of contemporary speech can be shaped to convey the gospel. But in the new Roman translation, the rhetorical style of complex Latinate sentences suggests that masterful

English cannot carry the mystery. Perhaps those who craft liturgical texts are often tempted to resurrect the archaic: I recall that the translators of the King James Version of the Bible decided to continue use of *thou-thine-thee*, even though it was passing out of colloquial use, because they judged that words which sounded laden with piety would lull users into acceptance.

The new Roman Order of Mass is a compendium of the antiquated. Important nouns (e.g., Priest, Order of Bishops, Martyrs) are capitalized, while unimportant nouns (e.g., deacon, people) are not. Common titles (e.g., opening prayer, censor) are replaced with traditional sacral terms (e.g., collect prayer, thurible). The church is a she. The word *soul* shows up repeatedly. (I enjoyed asking my students whether they had a soul—most said yes—and if they had one, what it was—big blank.) Does not the choice of archaisms suggest that God is essentially old-fashioned? In the 21st century, what do we mean when we speak about “souls”? The incarnation says to me that our daily speech can carry the presence of God, but perhaps we prefer hiding in our grandmother’s attic chest.

For me, the linguistic nadir in the Roman rite is the wording at the cup: Jesus “took this precious chalice in his holy and venerable hands.” Of *this*, I ask, what is the referent? Of *precious*, I think of Gollum, or worse yet, Precious Moments. Of *chalice*, I say that although it is a possible translation of the Latin *calix*, even Indiana Jones could distinguish the cup from a chalice. Of *venerable*, the dictionary agrees with me that the English word connotes age. I cannot fathom how this phrasing could have been proposed, let alone approved and required.

This lamentable new rite does not represent liturgical language that is communally acceptable, biblically accurate, theologically helpful or linguistically masterful, and it has impelled some Catholic liturgical scholars to conclude that, well, actually, words don’t really matter all that much. This strikes me as a counsel of despair, the sad cry of faithful worshipers who feel themselves helpless. I hope that this sense of resignation is not contagious but that all of us, in our varied Christian assemblies, will tirelessly address these issues, toward the continuously renewed vibrancy of our liturgical language.

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by Thomas G. Long

Why sermons bore us

LIKE OTHER teachers of preaching, I listen to a lot of sermons, sometimes a dozen in a single day. I have noticed that this fact rarely evokes covetous sighs from my faculty colleagues, many of whom imagine a daily regimen of multiple homilies as akin to endless trips to the periodontist.

Contrary to expectations, though, I find that helping students preach for the first time carries the excitement of teaching sky-diving to beginners. There is always that telltale widening of the eyes as they stand in the open bay of the pulpit feeling the wind whip by, staring into the depths below and suddenly becoming aware of what they are about to do as you tap them on the shoulder and say, "Go!"

Classroom adventures notwithstanding, for many people the words *boredom* and *sermon* are a proper pair, like *horse* and *carriage*. Pulpit search committees almost always top their wish lists with "good preacher" and report that their searches lead them through dry and waterless places. Last year, Monsignor Mariano Crociata, secretary-general of the Italian Bishops' Conference, made a splash on the pages of the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano* when he slammed dull preachers. "Too often," he complained, "sermons are just boring mush."

News? Maybe, but it's old news. In his book *Preaching for Today*, Clyde E. Fant surveys church history for attitudes toward sermons and finds the centuries littered with complaints about sermonic humdrum. When a woman in the Middle Ages was rebuked from the pulpit for gossiping, she mounted a counterattack. Pointing at the preacher, she retorted, "Indeed, sir, I know the one who's been doing the most babbling!"

The intriguing puzzle to me is not why centuries of churchgoers have carped about boring sermons, but why it is that sermons often seem so much more boring than they really are, objectively measured. It's been said that 99 out of 100 people are interesting once you get to know them, and the one who's not is interesting by virtue of being the exception. So it is for sermons. It is actually rare to find a sermon completely devoid of inspiration or creativity, yet *sermon* has become a word like *politics*, a noble term with a tarnished reputation. People who remain alert through an NPR report on agricultural reforms in the Sudan or who are all eyes and ears for a half-hour pitch on QVC for zircon earrings become testy the moment a sermon overflows the banks of their endurance.

Why?

Some might say that the sermonic genre has outrun its use-

fulness. It's too hierarchical, too linear and too slow for a fast-paced, visually oriented Twitter and Google+ culture. That argument might be persuasive if charges of preaching's obsolescence hadn't been raised and dropped so often over the years. Also, there is the curious fact that the American sermon, after gradually shrinking for decades to fit diminishing attention spans, is getting a bit longer nowadays, and it is the electronically savvy churches with their longer teaching-oriented "messages," so appealing to the wireless generation, that are beefing up the average.

Ironically, much of the snickering about boring sermons comes not because we expect so little but because we have hoped for so much. Barth once described preaching as happening in the context of one urgent question hanging in the air: "Is it true? Is God present?" Perhaps more muted in our time than in Barth's, the question nevertheless endures, and a deep hunger persists for a word from beyond us, a word from the Lord, a word that can gather us up and transform us, a trustworthy word, a word that can both judge the increasingly slippery and deceptive words of our public discourse and call our shared language to more redemptive purposes.

If there is no such word, then we are left to ourselves—our boring selves. Walter Benjamin once recounted the story of a 19th-century Paris neurologist whose patient was complaining of boredom, of a debilitating ennui. The physician performed a thorough physical examination. "There's nothing wrong with you," pronounced the doctor. "Just try to relax—find something to entertain you. Go see Deburau some evening, and life will look different to you," said the physician, referring to a popular French comic and mime.

"Ah dear sir," responded the patient. "I *am* Deburau."

We are *all* Deburau, weary of our own amusements. We joke about boring sermons, but often it is we who are boring—and bored. We say that sermons have bored us when actually they have disappointed us, failing to be the alternative word we need, failing to be the speech that arises not from our own meager entertainments but from the life of the Spirit. "We are bored," said Benjamin, "when we don't know what we are waiting for." One thing we are waiting for is for preachers who feel the strong wind, who sense the heights above them and the abyss below and take a deep breath and preach a life-changing gospel.

Thomas G. Long teaches at Emory University's Candler School of Theology.

IN Review

Dry country

by Anne Blue Wills

If ever the phrase “unintended consequences” applied to a situation, it does to the epic story of the 18th Amendment, added to the U.S. Constitution in 1919, and its undoing by the 21st Amendment 14 years later. Prohibition of the “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors,” enshrined in law as the Volstead Act, did initially suppress alcohol consumption in the U.S., but almost immediately it also produced a flourishing black market, organized crime and disorganized politics.

Twentieth-century Prohibition grew from the efforts of the Anti-Saloon League, “the mightiest pressure group in the nation’s history.” Women such as “Mother” Eliza Thompson, Frances Willard, Mary Hanchett Hunt and the hatchet-wielding Carrie Nation dominated post-Civil War liquor reform. But the Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1893 by Oberlin alumnus and Congregational minister Howard Hyde Russell, led an odd coalition of southern Democrats, suffragists, progressives and industrialists with merciless effectiveness. Its slogan: “The Church in Action Against the Saloon.”

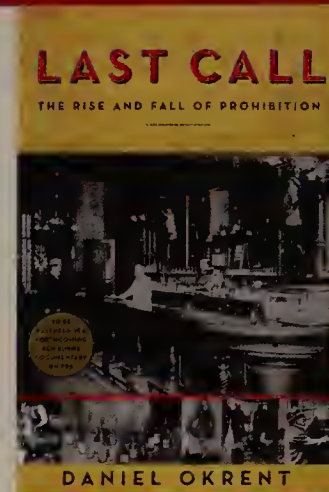
The Anti-Saloon League began its campaign for an amendment in November 1913. Time was of the essence: congressional districts would be reapportioned after the 1920 census, with representatives from booming cities (home to the immigrant populations that Prohibitionists feared) taking over formerly rural, presumably dry seats. The league and its allies therefore spent the years before 1919 working vigorously both to defeat wets and to get dry laws on the books in dozens of states. League forces also determined the strict language of the 18th Amendment.

Daniel Okrent rightly credits the

Anti-Saloon League with engineering the passage of the first constitutional amendment to address individual Americans’ private behavior. In one of several places where Okrent seems to misunderstand the U.S. religious landscape, however, he describes the league as mobilizing “the nation’s literalist Protestant churches and their congregations.” A coalition of mainly Methodist and Baptist churches at the turn of the century cannot be accurately characterized by the word *literalist*, not only because the divisions between biblical inerrantists and modernists had not yet hardened, but also because a literalist reading of the Bible’s views on drinking alcohol is impossible.

Likewise, Okrent calls Prohibition campaigner William Jennings Bryan a “Faith-Based Liberal.” The label might give contemporary readers some idea of where Bryan stood, but it would be an incomplete if not incorrect idea since Bryan’s progressivism grew precisely out of his biblical traditionalism. Another token of Okrent’s difficulties with meaningfully sorting out these Protestant activists is his likening of Wayne Wheeler, the chief engine of the Anti-Saloon League, to the risible Ned Flanders of television’s *The Simpsons*.

The second part of Okrent’s book, titled “The Flood,” details Americans’ numerous creative evasions of the alcohol ban, demonstrating one of the era’s ironies: “Prohibition was better than no liquor at all.” Caggy drinkers—and wily businesspeople—exploited the exceptions for domestic, religious and medicinal use of alcohol. Okrent revels in sharing the details of how famous brands originated in such circumstances. Mondavi Vineyards, Beaulieu Vineyard and Seagram’s all



Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition

By Daniel Okrent

Scribner, 480 pp., \$17.00 paperback

started by squeezing through legal loopholes. Charles Walgreen, who sold liquor along with soda fountain offerings, did not build a drugstore empire on milkshakes alone. Robert Wood Johnson II, of today’s “family company,” used to patronize the rumrunners off the Jersey coast for evening drinks.

Readers will also learn the origins and mechanics of speakeasies, cocktail parties, soft-drink production, oceangoing cruises, mixed-race clubs and cigarette boats. Powder rooms and table service evolved because of women’s presence on the public drinking scene; a woman could frequent a speakeasy and maintain her reputation as long as she did not lollygag at the bar. Other changes resonated politically: Prohibition led to the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, the now-customary seven-year clock for amendment ratification, and legal wiretapping.

Unfortunately—because it ends up mocking the sincerity of many who worked in good faith for Prohibition’s passage—Okrent’s glib tone intensifies in this section of the book. He emphasizes the misguided efforts of racists, nativists and retrograde religionists to the exclusion of social welfare concerns. Sloppy enforcement and wild evasions played havoc with the Prohibitionists’ intentions, and this circumstance makes the Prohibitionists downright laughable

Anne Blue Wills teaches the history and culture of U.S. religions at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina.

to Okrent. Does he want to say that prohibition of any kind is never good social policy? One can make that argument, but more adroitly than this.

How did Prohibition finally come apart? By 1924, Congress included a "vocal wet caucus," including Representative Fiorello La Guardia of New York. Congressional hearings in 1926 focused in part on the rise of organized crime. The dries did not surrender easily, however: as urban populations grew "even faster than the farm population was shrinking," dries answered by getting behind the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924. Astonishingly, they also blocked the 1920 congressional reapportionment through most of the decade.

The leadership among anti-Prohibitionists had also shifted during the 1920s, moving from the heads of the alcohol industry to the captains of industry, who wanted alcohol to be legal and taxable. The chair of General Motors and the DuPont Company, Pierre S. du Pont, became the "indisputable commander in

chief" of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment. His organization's goal: repeal of the federal income tax, which was instituted as part of Prohibition to replace alcohol excise tax revenue.

Prohibition suffered another blow in the 1928 elections. Even as voters rejected wet Roman Catholic Democrat Al Smith, they voted down stricter liquor law enforcement. But the Depression is what really finished off Prohibition. Hampered from the start by skimpy federal appropriations, in the teeth of economic disaster states and localities had no way to enforce Volstead. By 1930, a "virtual local option" held sway everywhere in the U.S. In the 1930 elections, voters punished the Republicans for the economy, and (wet) Democrats benefited. The 21st Amendment was ratified in December 1933. Yet unintended consequences continued. Okrent observes that because drink could now be regulated, "the Twenty-first Amendment made it harder, not easier, to get a drink."

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Readers with a passing interest in the Prohibition era will enjoy Okrent's raucous telling. Those who want a more measured account can consult classics such as Norman Clark's *Deliver Us from Evil* (1976), W. J. Rorabaugh's *The Alcoholic Republic* (1979), John Kobler's *Ardent Spirits* (1973) and Thomas Pagram's *Battling Demon Rum* (1998). Okrent clearly places his sympathies with the wets. Yet good history empathizes with its subjects in order to understand them—including actors whom history proved wrong in some way. Novelist Anne Lamott teaches her writing students to remember that the villain has a heart and the hero has great flaws. Okrent's emphasis on the wets as this era's heroes—not just in spite of but because of their flaws—contributes to the book's jokey feel. His retelling scripts the dries as thoroughly misguided at best and villainous at worst, and therefore blinds us to some of the sincere motives of the Prohibition activists.

The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race

By Willie James Jennings
Yale University Press, 384 pp.,
\$23.00 paperback

In modern imperialism, race, colonization and Christianity have historically been so intrinsically embedded with one another that the connections between them have seemed natural, and Christian theologians have participated in the geographical and geopolitical construction of this imperialism. Willie James Jennings's book is a genealogy of their participation.

Jennings begins by telling of experiences in which he, his parents and his community were objects of evangelism and missions. His parents, migrants from the Deep South, had settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the mecca of Reformed Christianity. Stories and storytelling were deter-

minant aspects of his upbringing, and his parents were devout believers; Jesus and biblical faith were ever-present realities. Jennings remembers that one day white missionaries from the Christian Reformed Church in the neighborhood invited themselves into his mother's garden to inquire into her faith, talk about their church and inform her about the programs available for children. He remembers that they addressed him as if he were five years old, when he was actually 12.

The visitors were unaware that his parents were well planted in their community, were pillars of their church and had been living in the neighborhood for years. Jennings, his parents and his neighborhood were suddenly objects of missions. In that garden meeting, what came together were two Christianities, one black and one white. Jennings ponders: "Why did these men not know me, . . . not know the multitude of other black Christians who filled the neighborhood that surrounded that church?"

Years later, Jennings was a student at Calvin College, a Christian Reformed institution, and was delivering his first sermon at chapel. His theology professors shook his hand afterward in gratitude for the word he had preached. Jennings remembers that this moment contrasted with the first. He experienced "a sense of connection and belonging and of a freedom to claim, to embrace, to make familiar one who is not." In this moment he imagined Christian intimacy as a genuine possibility. The two moments frame Jennings's book, which traces Christian imaginations of faith and race through displacement, translation and intimacy.

Part one, titled "Displacement," narrates Portuguese trafficking in sub-Saharan African slaves and the Spanish conquest of Peru. In the first story, the

Reviewed by Victor Anderson, professor of ethics, African American and diaspora studies and religious studies at Vanderbilt University



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chronicler of Prince Henry of Portugal interprets the prince's need to legitimize control over black flesh and to provide a Christian theological framing of this power. In a theology of creation and providence, the chronicler articulates the suffering of the captives in a penitential prayer that imagines Christian faith in creation and divine providence; this eases his conscience while justifying Portugal's power over black flesh.

In a parallel narrative of a Jesuit in Peru, Jennings expands the chronicler's theodicy problem by considering it in relation to the displacement of Peruvian peoples. Like Prince Henry's chronicler, the Jesuit provides a theological answer within the pedagogy of creation and providence. It is not an easy task, for the church's teachings on natural history fail against New World realities. The Jesuit's consequent history reproduces creation, providence and race within "pedagogical imperialism." Both accounts produce Christian imaginings of theology and

race that distort Christian intimacy. They imagine not only a new creation but also a new origin of race.

In part two, called "Translation," Jennings starts by narrating the British missions to the Zulus of South Africa. He highlights how translation of the Bible into Zulu vernacular both converted and educated indigenous peoples whose traditional world was collapsing in the wake of European conquest, the confiscation of Zulu lands and the Europeans' strategies of racial containment. Literacy alienated Christian Africans from their peoples and traditions, containing them through Western domesticity while they were denied equality with other Christians.

Jennings next narrates the creation of the "African." He draws on the *Interesting Narrative* of Olaudah Equiano, an abolitionist and former slave. Equiano's words of faith, hope, assimilation and racial equality through Christian civilization required, Jennings writes, a "Christian vision that lacks the ability to imagine

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multitude, different peoples joined together in love, and thus lacks the desire to reconstitute its life through the many."

Part three is titled "Intimacy." In it, Jennings discusses the significance that literacy holds in the production of segregated mentalities and segregated Christianities. Vernacular translations of the Bible led easily to Protestant national supersessionism. Literacy was the key to national articulation of white space and was instrumental in containing black imaginaries. If Christians are to overcome mangled, segregated mentalities, says Jennings, they must have a new imagining of right relations: a "deep joining, the opening of lives to one another in love and desire."

In a constructive theological move, Jennings asks readers to build a Christian vision of connectedness with biblical Israel as an answer to Christian supersessionism. By redeeming biblical history and hence biblical theology, he writes,

the people of God reach down to join the land and reach out to join those around them, their near and distant

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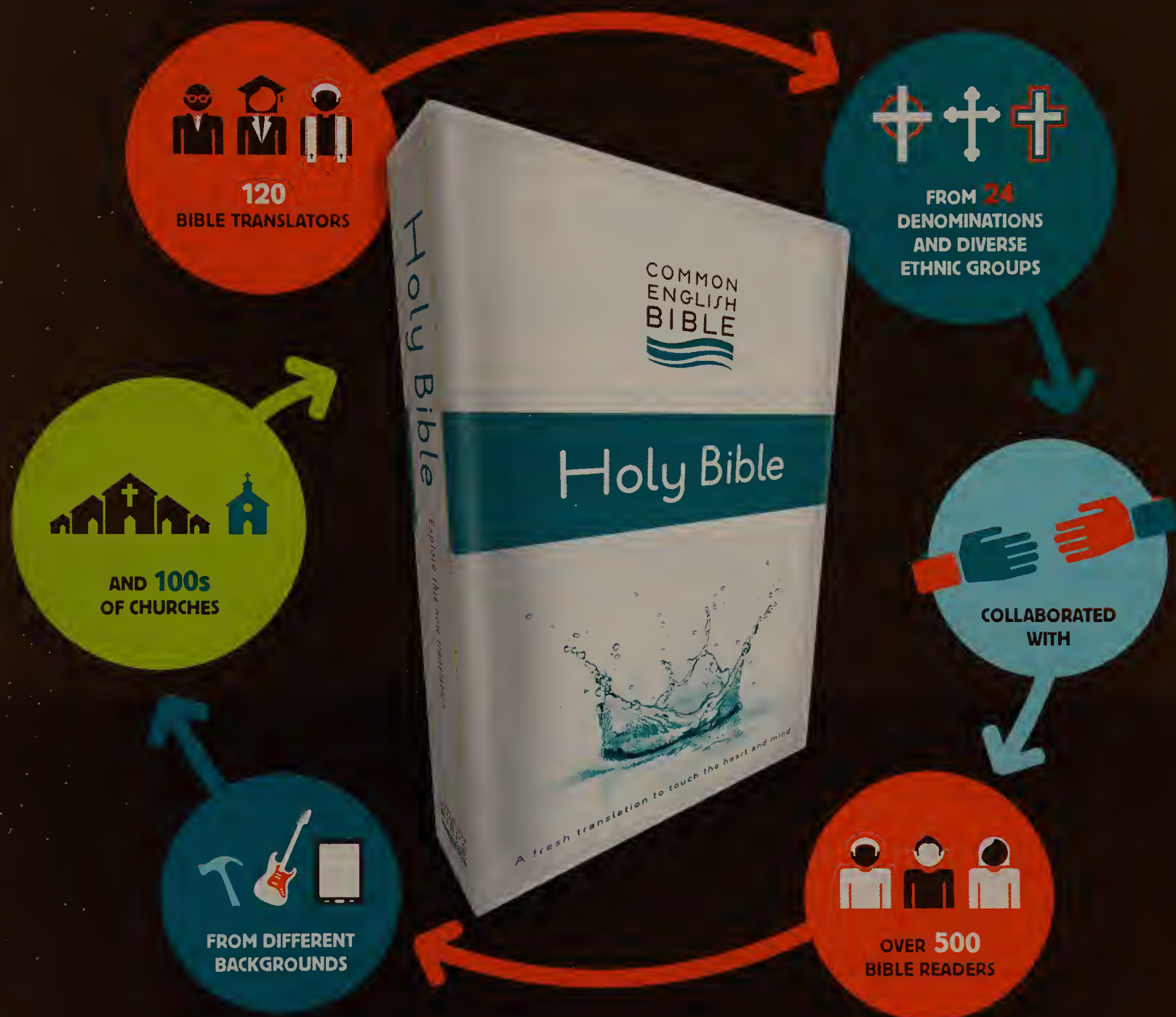
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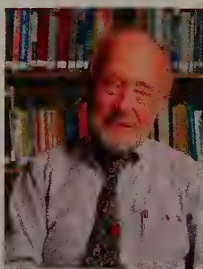


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neighbors. This joining involves first a radical remembering of the place, a discerning of the histories and stories of those for whom that land was the facilitator of their identity. This must be done to gather the fragments of identity that remain to learn from them (or at least from their memory) who we might become in that place.

For Jennings, Israel's biblical faith and hope points toward a Jewish Jesus who imagined a kingdom of joinings, rooted in real places, real lived experiences and God's incarnational love between Jews and gentiles. He proposes this Christian alternative to the supersession of empires and nations, classes and estates, races and ethnicities, and whites and blacks.

Jennings's book deconstructs a complex history of contact and conquest that made possible the segregated Christianities he experienced in his mother's garden and the false intimacy he experi-

enced as a student at Calvin College. I have great sympathy with his critiques of Christian supersession, especially in the case of white hegemony over black flesh. However, I find a certain irony in his endorsement of biblical Israel as a key to overcoming supersessionism. What are Christians to make of the new covenant? To identify with biblical Israel's story is to commit one's Christian imaginings to a story of displacement, translation and othering from within salvation history itself.


As a tale of contact, conquest and decline, biblical Israel's history points to a Jewish Jesus who invites all into intimacy with God and levels the wall that divides Jews and gentiles. This is recognizably gospel. Whether Jennings can have gospel without supersession has yet to be imagined. Nevertheless, his imagining of intimacy, joining and right relations without supersession is powerfully narrated in his theological history.



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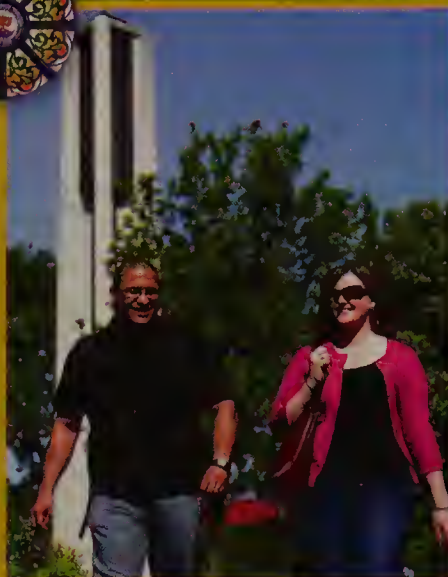
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The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History

By Jill Lepore

Princeton University Press,
232 pp., \$12.95 paperback

Lepore has a trifocal perspective. With one lens she examines the contemporary Tea Party movement. With another she sets the current group and the politics behind it in the context of the original Boston Tea Party and the whole Revolutionary era. And with a third she focuses on the way in which the founding of this country has long been co-opted for political purposes. "When in doubt, in American politics, left, right, or center, deploy the Founding Fathers," Lepore says. She skillfully dismantles the views of those who argue for strict interpretation of what the original framers of the Constitution meant. Tea Party types and strict constitutionalists are guilty of fundamentalism, she says, just like those who interpret the Bible literally.

Augustine's Confessions: A Biography

By Garry Wills

Princeton University Press, 176 pp., \$19.95

This is one of the first volumes in a new series, *Lives of Great Religious Books*. The intent of this series is to document how religious classics came to be and how they subsequently were transmitted, interpreted and used. Oddly, Wills devotes most of this volume on Augustine's *Confessions* to interpretation of the text itself. Wrapped around his commentary are short chapters on the book's context and creation and how it has been used and misused in the history of Christianity.

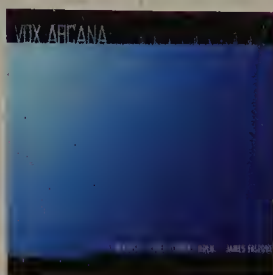
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ON Music



Other Doors
by Klang (Allos Documents)



Aerial Age
by Vox Arcana (Allos Documents)

In a formidable jazz town like Chicago, musicians who populate the club scene one night grace the world's concert stages the next. Two new projects feature three of the city's best: drummer/percussionist Tim Daisy, clarinetist James Falzone and cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm.

Daisy and Falzone trade places as bandleaders with gratifying, unexpected results. *Other Doors*, a tribute to Benny Goodman, began when the Jazz Institute of Chicago approached Falzone about a project to mark the Chicago-native bandleader's 100-year anniversary. Rising to the occasion, Klang launches Goodman's music—and Goodman-inspired originals—on improvised excursions that ricochet from familiar themes to ferocious flights and back.

On Goodman's "Breakfast Feud," Falzone pilots his clarinet like a joyful stunt flyer—but this playfulness is grounded by crisp mastery of the instrument and material. The title track, composed by Falzone, takes its name from Goodman's advocacy for African-American musicians. When Goodman's band toured the nation's dance halls, he defied convention by refusing to make his black players use different entrances from their white colleagues. The song begins with Falzone unfolding sepia tendrils, which wrap around Lonberg-Holm's droning cello and Daisy's muted,

majestic pounding. Together they produce a gripping shadow portrait of racism outclassed by brave defiance.

On *Aerial Age*, Daisy takes the helm as sole composer. "The Number 7" trots out seven-note runs in which clarinet, cello and marimba often lock time in military precision, peel apart into quizzical squeaks and hops and then fuse again behind the gallop of brushed cymbal and snare. On "The Silver Fence," the players sound as though they're making a jailbreak away from convention, yet they stay tethered together so as not to let it all fall apart. A surprising segue features brushed snare, cymbal and loping, plucked strings—reminiscent of Charles Mingus—before returning to the opening "jailbreak" theme.

Vox Arcana's music sometimes recalls radio static; it may not work for listeners who like their melody and meter straight. But those brave enough to take the ride will be pushed and pulled on a Tilt-A-Whirl of tempo and timbre. These three players mix the discipline of seasoned pros with acrobatic daring.

Kaivama

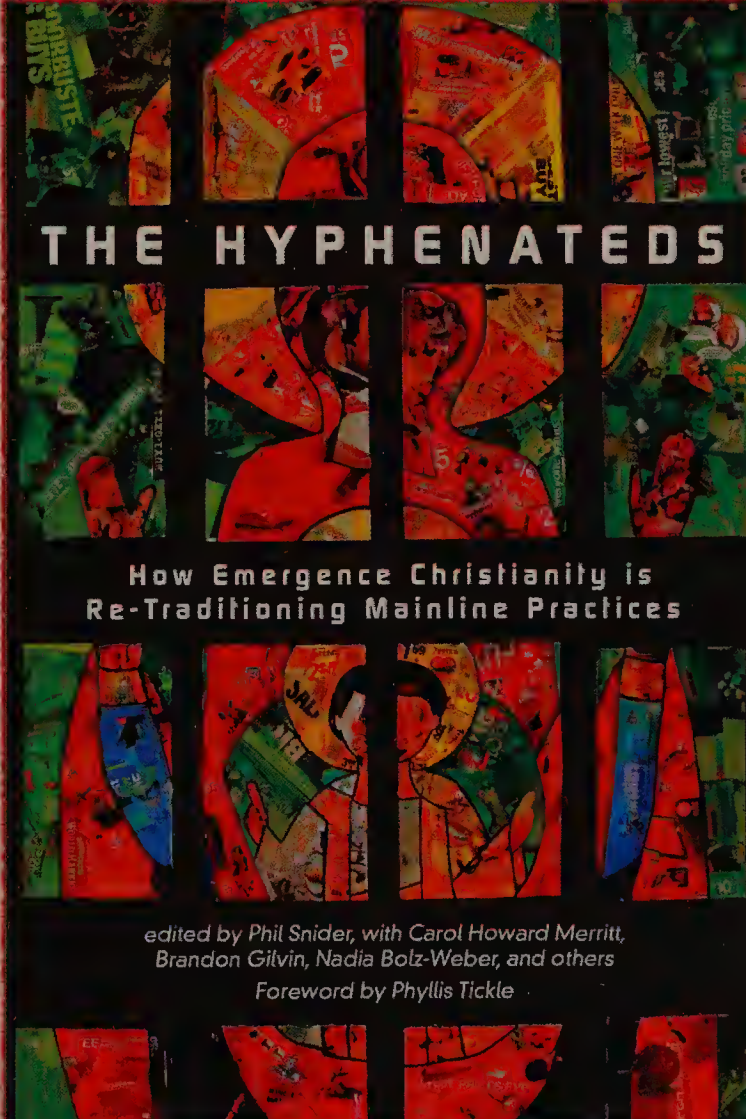
by Kaivama (self-released)

Lutheran rocker Jonathan Rundman is nothing if not prolific. Here he teams with violinist Sara Pajunen to form Kaivama, a folk music duo that yields tasty bluegrass instrumentals with a Finnish accent. Finland's Arto Järvelä plays strings on several tracks, including "Ruros," a plaintive, percussionless waltz. On the jauntier side, Rundman's "Edina Speedtrap" (named after his Minnesota hometown) is a sprightly mix of hoedown and Irish jig. Available at kaivama.com.

This Is Only a Test

by Smoking Popes (Asian Man)

Since recently reuniting, the Smoking Popes have been a different band from their 1990s heyday. Josh Caterer still sings about high school fodder from college to prom dates, but his conversion to Christianity seems to have added some depth to the band's catchy pop-punk tunes. The high-octane title track mulls life's reversal of fortunes, while "Letter



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Reviewed by Louis R. Carlozo, a music producer in Chicago.

to Emily,” accompanied by cello and acoustic guitar, has Caterer delivering a redemption missive to a girl from his past who committed suicide.

Hundred More Years

by Francesca Battistelli (Fervent/Curb)

Dove Award winner Francesca Battistelli has proved to be a refreshing breeze in the musty swamp of the Christian music industry, delivering material that sparkles with energy and vibrancy. Only in her mid-twenties, Battistelli has ears

for a great hook and lyrical smarts to match. On “This Is the Stuff,” she sings about how commonplace distractions keep her from connecting with the divine: “I lost my keys / In the great unknown. . . . In the middle of my little mess / I forget how big I’m blessed.”

The Secret Sisters

by The Secret Sisters (Beladroit)

In a recent Chicago concert, these real-life sisters (Laura and Lydia Rogers) sounded like angelic apparitions chan-

neled from the Grand Ole Opry circa 1955. No wonder T-Bone Burnett signed them to his boutique label for this debut, recorded on 1950s vintage equipment. The original ballad “Tennessee Me” recalls the earnest side of the Everly Brothers, while “The One I Love Is Gone” mixes minor-key dirge with bitter-sweet, honey-lemon harmonies. Highly recommended.

The Witmark Demos: 1962–1964

by Bob Dylan (Columbia)

Dylan fans rejoice at any opening of the vaults—this is volume 9 in his Bootleg Series—but this double disc also welcomes anyone who is new to the ’60s pioneer. Listening to early Dylan unadorned and unplugged is to witness this young man from Minnesota evolve not just in sound but in stature—from Woody Guthrie wannabe to street-smart social commentator. The 47 cuts here come from songwriting demos, and they include familiar classics (such as “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “The Times They Are a-Changin’”) rendered unfamiliar on piano.

Warmth in Winter

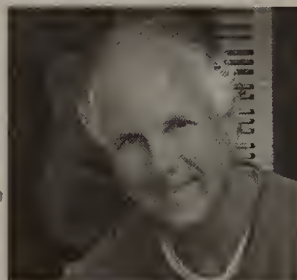
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A Better Life

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IMMIGRANT LIFE: *Carlos Galindo (Demián Bichir) is an undocumented worker whose attempt to improve his and his son's lot is stymied by a series of misfortunes.*

When the Italian director Vittorio De Sica helped craft the postwar cinematic movement known as neorealism, he was intent on finding lead actors who lacked any acting experience. He believed they were less likely to conjure up false emotions in such highly emotional films as *Shoeshine* and *Umberto D.* If you didn't know that the lead actor in *A Better Life*, Demián Bichir, was a star in Mexico, you might assume that director Chris Weitz and screenwriter Eric Eason were scrupulously following De Sica's blueprint, right down to trawling the corners of East L.A. in search of a tired-looking man to play Carlos Galindo, an undocumented worker who is struggling to make ends meet to help support himself and his teenage son, Luis (José Julián).

A Better Life eschews major plot twists in favor of small, realistic scenes of struggle. Carlos has been in the United States illegally for years, but all he has to show for it is a wife who has left him for greener pastures, an angry son who is being recruited by local gangs, and a low-paying gig as an assistant gardener. When he takes a leap of faith and goes into serious debt to buy his retiring boss's truck and his list of customers, Carlos sees a rare flash of light in a perpetually overcast sky. Anyone familiar with De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* can guess what happens next, as a desperate Carlos goes on a circuitous journey through L.A. in

search of justice. But this journey also leads him back to his first days in the U.S., when he still had great dreams for the future.

Bichir is remarkable as Carlos, allowing myriad emotions to form on his handsome, if aged, face. Though Carlos works like a dog and has little to show for it, he knows that he no longer has the luxury of expressing his frustration, not if he wants to keep Luis from falling into the clutches of those who live and breathe anger and frustration. Some critics have complained that the goodness that emanates from Carlos is a weakness in the film, as if they're unwilling to believe that a person of principle could be caught in such a societal vise. But I believed Bichir from the first shot of the film to the last.

His performance is so mesmerizing I even excused the occasional script foray into overly convenient plot lines: the filmmakers employ those coincidences to veer from Carlos's journey and make a larger point about the desperate things that desperate people will do to survive. A sequence at a Mexican rodeo is especially moving, as Luis, who is grudgingly helping his father in his search, comes face to face for the first time with the sort of pride that seems lost in the world of green cards and border crossings. It's a world that Carlos longs to hang onto even as he tries to make his way in the new world.

Super 8

Written and directed by J. J. Abrams

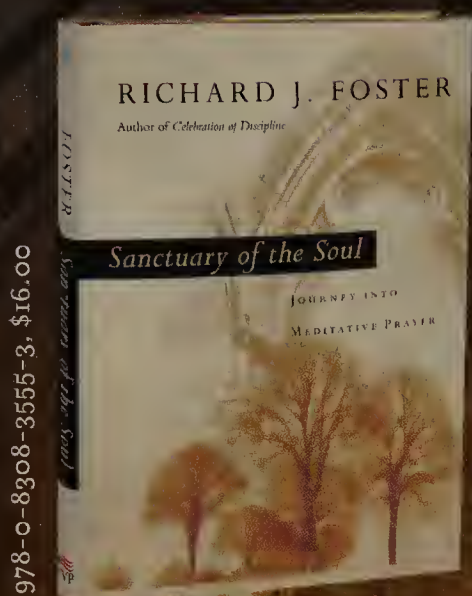
Starring Joel Courtney, Elle Fanning and Kyle Chandler

Super 8, written and directed by J. J. Abrams of *Lost* and *Alias* fame, is a curious film that gets curiouser and curiouser as it goes along. It's the first time I have ever seen a cinematic homage to a filmmaker who is actually in the film's credits: director Steven Spielberg, whose early work Abrams has in mind here, is one of the producers. The young characters in the film, which is set in 1979, look and act like all those mouthy kids from the early Spielberg era, right down to their banana-seat bikes and single parents.

The film starts out as a wonderfully creepy and beautifully photographed tale about a bunch of latchkey kids making a movie who accidentally film something they are not supposed to see. But it morphs into a hungry-alien smorgasbord that would not exist without a spaceship full of money and special effects. In the process, a movie that promises to be an extremely clever kid's version of *Blow Up*—complete with frustrated artist and sad love interest—turns into *Alien*, right down to the munching and crunching and the screaming of clueless adults as they go down the wrong tunnel or make the wrong decision.

Reviewed by John Petrakis, who teaches screenwriting in Chicago.

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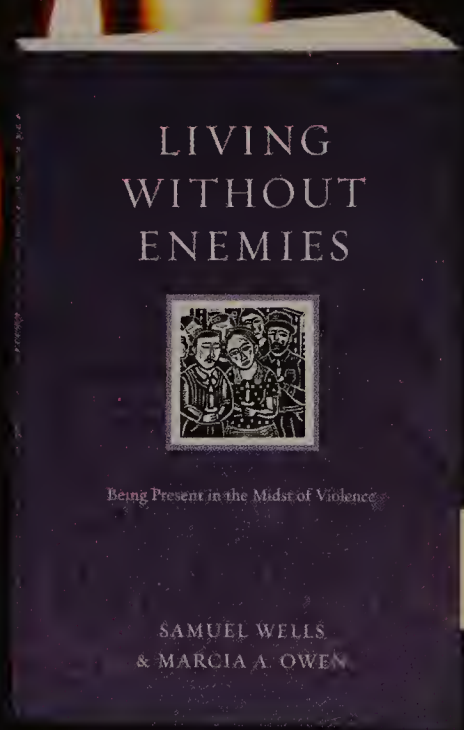
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by Philip Jenkins

When television documentaries explore Christianity, they have little difficulty finding diverse manifestations of faith and practice from around the world. A global survey also reveals a surprising, even startling, diversity when it comes to the content of the Bible.

The New Testament has been well defined for many centuries, and the canonical number of four Gospels dates to the second century. But the shape of the Old Testament is more uncertain. Western Protestants may be surprised to learn how relatively thin their own book is when compared to that of the Catholics, who value texts like Wisdom, Tobit and the two books of

and some were startled to find the disparity between Protestant and Catholic Bibles. On occasion those converts became suspicious about the explanations that missionaries offered for the differences. Some asked whether their pastors were keeping whole parts of the Bible secret, presumably for their own selfish ends.

The controversy separating Protestants and Catholics seems minor in view of the traditions of other communities which, though numerically small today, can claim impressively ancient roots. Little known in the West, for

early fourth century, and today claims an impressive 40 million followers.

So what does an Ethiopian Bible look like? Ethiopians speak of both a Broad and a Narrow Canon, but even the latter, more limited version is much larger than any Western counterpart. It contains in all 81 books, including most of the deuterocanonical works, but also some real surprises: Ethiopians canonize the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees, two texts that have had a persistent influence on the sectarian fringes of Christianity (and Judaism), but which have long since

work, though, the Watchers are precisely named (“Sam-lazaz, Araklba, Rameel . . .”) and their functions described in intimate detail. The whole work sounds like a manual for an ancient magician devising a script to conjure up angels and spirits—which may have been one of its early functions. Yet the book certainly had devotees in the earliest church, and our canonical epistle of Jude (vv. 14–15) quotes Enoch’s writings as inspired prophecy.

Just as puzzling is Jubilees, a second-century BC work that Ethiopians call the Book of Division. It grows out of a thought world just as fascinated by angels and apparitions as the writers of Enoch. Jubilees, though, is founded on a rigorous Jewish legalism that makes it a curious candidate for inclusion in a Christian canon.

When we see churches using such (to us) bizarre texts, some might even doubt the Christian credentials of such bodies, or ask whether they might have succumbed to some form of syncretism, incorporating Judaic or Gnostic heresies. But these texts are canonical in one of the deepest-rooted Christian traditions. In other words, this is not an instance of some upstart sect picking the scriptures it happens to have come across in an academic anthology.

The Apocalypse of Ezra is part of canonical scripture for some Christian churches.

Maccabees. This difference is quite recent. During the Reformation, Protestant translators segregated those books into a section labeled Apocrypha (though ordinary believers continued to read and value these books at least into the early 19th century, when they largely dropped out of use).

That timing meant that when Protestant missionaries set out for Africa and Asia, the Apocrypha was not a part of the Bibles they carried with them, and those texts never had much impact on emerging churches. Over time, however, new converts compared notes,

instance, is a book called the Apocalypse of Ezra, which is part of canonical scripture for the Syriac Orthodox Church, the lineal heir of the most ancient congregations of Palestine and Syria. And the short Psalm 151 is canonical for the Syriac Orthodox, Armenian, Assyrian and Ethiopian churches and even for the Eastern Orthodox.

The most striking example of a different canon is the one used by the venerable church of Ethiopia or, to give it its proper name, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo (“Oneness”) Church. This community traces its roots to the

vanished from mainstream use elsewhere.

Enoch is an ancient Jewish work that took final form in the first century BC and survives in complete form only in the Ethiopian language of Ge’ez. To read Enoch is to plunge into an esoteric world of angels and secret revelations, the phantasmagoric universe of “the Watchers, the children of heaven.” Elaborating in detail a cryptic tale in Genesis, Enoch tells how the Watchers mated with human women, leaving as issue the giant Nephilim. In this later

Philip Jenkins’s Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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Prayer Cloths, by Sonja Olson

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